

22nd Battalion Association

AUCKLAND BRANCH

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22ND BATTALION NEWS

P.O. Box 13-058,
Onehunga,
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OCTOBER, 1991

TIME MARCHES ON

The days, weeks and months on my calendar have a nasty habit of disappearing into the past in a relentless way, causing me to wonder periodically just what (if anything) I have done or achieved in the past few weeks or months. We all have to admit to ourselves that we are steadily getting older and have less energy and enthusiasm than we used to have. But there's still plenty in life to keep us interested and moderately active and I'm sure that most of us have been able to forget our aches and pains while keeping our eyes glued to the T.V. set during this year's Rugby World Cup series.

Since the last issue of this Newsletter, almost all of the activities in Auckland Branch of the Association took place during April. We had a very enjoyable Social Function at Grey Lynn R.S.C. on 7th April, with an improved attendance (46), including a good number from out of town. DOUG FROGGATT and the MERV. ASHMANS were there from Tauranga, the LAURIE BALDERSTONS from Kaiwaka, the MICK ANDERSONS from Hamilton, the KEITH MARTINS from Matamata, JIM ALLEN from Taradale, and the SNOW LEIGHTONS from Kaipara Heads. A most welcome group from out of Auckland were three representatives of the Sullivan family:- Tom's widow, ELSIE SULLIVAN, his sister SANNA DONNELLY and Jack's widow, MARY SULLIVAN, who happened to be in Auckland at the time and may decide to move here from Wellington.

On Poppy Day, our small group of volunteers were on duty at our stall in Karangahape Road, as for many years past. Branch President GEORGE MATTHEWS said to me afterwards that he wondered if we would be able to continue to accept this responsibility, as two hours of standing was too much for people in our age group. We may have to consider making it one hour shifts or arrange comfortable seating.

On Anzac Day, a small number of us were able to make the shortened march to the Auckland Domain Cenotaph without much difficulty but we did not object to the chairs provided for us on the Court of Honour. Do they really have to have that small army of official wreath-layers?

NEWS IN BRIEF

MIKE CRAWFORD has changed his address several times but now seems to have a permanent one - at 245 Ocean Beach Road, Mt. Maunganui. A quite confusing number of Crawfords, at least three of them related, served in the Battalion and, recently, I had to enlist the help of DENNY REIDY, keeper of the National Roll, to get them all sorted out. Here's the list:-

6803	A.F. Crawford, Manurewa - Deceased 1988
6245	J.M. Crawford - Deceased 1987 (Mike's elder brother).
47963	G.M. Crawford (Mike's younger brother) - Gone.No address. Was at Papatoetoe.
437285	L.R.D. Crawford - At Putaruru, we think.
33561	J.B. Crawford - Wellington
	J.(Mike) Crawford - Mt.Maunganui

News in Brief (contd)

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Mike's given name, an Old Testament one beginning with J., is highly secret and confidential. He much prefers to be known as Mike.

LOU DUNHAM has moved from Auckland to near Whangarei. His address is:- Unit 1, Ngunguru Motor Lodge, Ngunguru, via Whangarei.

GORDON COUCHMAN of Tauranga, one of our long-serving past Presidents, has always been a keen sportsman who looked young and fit. We heard a month or two ago that he was on the waiting list for a hip operation. The best of luck, Gordon, for a successful operation and a speedy recovery.

T.A. (Tom) REYNOLDS, formerly of Pukekohe, is likely to have gone to Australia and may have died over there. Is anyone able to confirm this?

MRS. M.C. BELL, widow of the late RON BELL, has asked us if anyone is able and willing to make a copy of the Battalion History available to her son and grandchildren in Australia. She would be happy to pay for it. We promised to mention this request in the Newsletter, just in case there's a spare copy somewhere.

ROLL OF HONOUR

30735	W.B. BRIGHTWELL	Taupo	28/4/91
28249	V. CRAMPTON	Coromandel	14/7/91
446862	W.H. DOHERTY	Tauranga	18/7/91
45782	R.R. FOREMAN	Te Awamutu	6/6/91
31423	E.T.(BILL)GRAHAM	Auckland	1/9/91
76455	E.N.(TED)LEE	Te Aroha	30/8/91
33511	R.J.(JACK)MORGAN	Tauranga	1/5/91
36943	A.C.S.(TOBY)PEARCE	Tauranga	3/5/91
622816	M.R.(ROBBIE)ROBINSON	Tauranga	1/5/91

This list, thankfully, shorter than the one published in our March issue. It includes only the names of deceased former 22nd men in our Branch area and is as comprehensive as we can make it from the information available.

NATIONAL REUNION - FEB.22/23

Manawatu Branch has sent out its final Newsletter about the National Reunion to be held in Palmerston North next February. Over 300 have already registered and this number can be expected to increase rapidly from now on. The charges are:- Saturday - \$20 per head; Sunday - \$35 per head; Administration fee - \$5. Early accommodation bookings are strongly recommended, as two other Reunions are to be held in P.N. that weekend.

To participate in the TFS draw, you need to have \$100 in your TFS account by 30/12/91. The closing date for Reunion registration is 31/1/92. If you have not already registered, you need to send \$20 per head now, with details indicating whether you will be there both days or on Saturday or Sunday only to:- NITA MENHENNET, 5 Plymouth Street, Palmerston north. Don't keep on putting it off. Refunds will be made to anyone who has to cancel through ill-health or other reasons.

CRETE - 50 YEARS ON

The 50th anniversary of the Battle of Crete was duly commemorated, as well as celebrated, in May of this year. 22nd Battalion was well represented among the Crete veterans who went back to the island and all the veterans would have experienced the feelings of emotion, nostalgia and sadness inseparable from such an occasion, as well as enjoying the bountiful hospitality of the people of Crete. As ANN ELDER put it in a Herald article at the end of last year:- "There is no place on earth where New Zealanders are more welcome than Crete".

Back here in New Zealand, this memorable occasion was marred for everyone connected with 22nd Battalion by a renewed attack on the integrity, courage and military judgment of the Battalion's first commanding officer, Lt.Col. L.W. ANDREW, V.C. What made this attack by an armchair critic and historian even worse was that it was included in an address given at the 50th anniversary commemoration service in Wellington Cathedral, attended by the Governor-General and many other notabilities, including some distinguished Greek visitors, who were clearly embarrassed by it. The address was given by CHRIS. PUGSLEY, a post-War Lt.Colonel in the N.Z. Army. His attack on Les. Andrew was headlined in the N.Z. Herald's report of the service and was no doubt given the same prominence in other New Zealand newspapers.

The essence of what Pugsley had to say was that Col.Andrew, whose battalion was charged with the defence of Maleme aerodrome, made a wrong decision on the first night of the battle. "Everywhere the invasion faltered. Only at Maleme was the issue in doubt. Yet, on the first night, a New Zealand battalion commander, a highly decorated hero of the First World War, made the wrong decision and abandoned the hill point 107 when it was his duty to hold it at all costs". What Pugsley did not mention was that other N.Z. Officers, including General Freyberg himself and Brigadiers HARGEST and INGLIS have also been criticised for their roles in the battle. As previous armchair critics have done, Pugsley virtually singled out LES ANDREW as a scapegoat for the loss of Crete and in, doing so, he traduced and defamed a fine soldier, whose military record is "second to none".

The outcome of Mr. Pugsley's address was a proliferation of newspaper articles, letters to the editors of newspapers and other correspondence, telephone calls, etc. and countless private discussions. Wellington Branch President MICK KENNY told the Herald's correspondent that he did not consider it appropriate to "knock dead men" 50 years after a battle. "We admired Les Andrew. None of us is ever perfect and he was under great pressure. Freyberg labelled him a great leader and soldier and we of the 22nd Battalion stand by him". Privately, Mick also said what many of us felt - that it was in very bad taste to use a Church (a Cathedral no less) to voice opinions of this kind. Members of the Andrew family were understandably upset and angered by this latest attack on their father and BRUCE ANDREW, one of Les Andrew's sons, made some pertinent comments in a letter to Mick Kenny. He pointed out that when the official War History of Crete was published, his father had declined to comment on the controversy because he was a professional soldier and did not wish to criticise men who had been killed in action later in the war. Bruce also said that several recent histories had exonerated his father's actions and that Gen. Freyberg had been quoted in the Battalion's official history as saying:- "Let me say at once that I do not for one moment hold Col. Andrew responsible for the failure to hold Maleme".

There were many others who came to the defence of Col. Andrew's actions at Maleme. One of the group of 70 veterans who were in the official N.Z. party that went

Crete - 50 Years On (Contd)

to Crete in May, wrote to the Herald on his return and had this to say:- "If ifs and ands were pots and pans what a noise they'd make. If 50 years ago we had had their advice, their armchair generalship, the McDowells, the Helms and Pugsleys and Baileys wouldn't need to ask why Crete was lost, and it certainly wasn't because a New Zealand battalion abandoned its position. It really was due to something more basic: a hundred or so yards of canvas sewn into gun belts for the Vickers guns was all that was required. Once the 8 or 10 belts a gun were used up, that was it. There is not the slightest doubt that, had those Vickers guns been supplied adequately with belts - there was no shortage of ammunition - the beach and the drome at Maleme would have been untenable under sustained machine-gun fire". This writer could also have mentioned some of the other shortages of vital equipment, such as base-plates for the 3" Mortars, that also hampered the defence of Maleme and Crete as a whole.

Two well-respected former officers of the Battalion, both of whom were in the thick of things at Maleme, also made their views public to Herald readers in no uncertain terms. STAN JOHNSON, who was C Company's O.C. in Crete, said that he had been appalled to read of Lt.Col. Pugsley's address at the commemoration service in Wellington, an address in which Col. Andrew had once again been traduced, this time by a young professional soldier turned historian. "This has been fashionable among certain historians for 50 years. While evidence supporting a very different view of this brave and tenacious soldier's orders has lain unknown and unread in New Zealand archives, Les Andrew has had to bear the opprobrium of defeat which properly belongs elsewhere. Time, and yet another book on Crete slowly in the making, this time by an Australian, will show another picture of that fateful day on Maleme, I believe. In the meantime one more cruel attack on Les Andrew has marred a solemn celebration, wounded his family, and injured those who remain of the 22nd Battalion".

A letter from HADDON DONALD, a platoon commander at Maleme who later became C.O. of the Battalion, appeared in the same issue of the N.Z. Herald and included these comments:- "Like Col. Andrew, a good general knows when to retire. Many of us lived to fight another day because of these decisions. We lost Crete; we won the war. Some of us who suffered humiliating defeats in Greece and Crete were still fighting when 22nd Battalion led the allied forces into Trieste, subdued the final two German strongholds, accepted the surrender of the German general in command of that theatre and so ended the war in Europe".

In another letter to the Herald, R.H.J. BAILEY of Birkenhead blamed Brigadier Hargest for his failure to order 21 and 23 Battalions to support 22 Battalion and said that, when Andrew told the Brigadier that he would be forced to retire from Hill 107 at 9 p.m., Hargest's response was: "If you must, you must". "With those fateful few words, the outcome of the battle was sealed. Such were the German losses that their paratroops, with one minor exception in the Ardennes, were never again employed in a major airborne assault".

WHY MALEME WAS LOST

Starting with the advantage of having been a company commander in the Battle of Crete, STAN JOHNSON has devoted a great deal of time in the past few years to carrying out intensive research into Army archives in New Zealand and overseas and has had the further advantage of access to German records of the attack on the Maleme

Why Maleme Was Lost (Contd)

airfield and its surrounding area. All this qualifies Stan to be considered a military historian in his own right. He is especially concerned that very little has been written about the tasks given to the various N.Z. battalions and the strength of the German forces directed at their positions. For example, no attack was directed on 20th May (apart from the paratroops dropped from the JU 52s) at 21st, 23rd and 28th Battalions. The German attack by four Battalions of the Assault Regiment was targeted only at 22nd Battalion. No other unit on Crete was attacked by such a force and nowhere else were the Germans able to land two battalions in safety, form up and attack as ground troops. Here is Stan's review of the attack on Maleme:-

Lt.Col. L.W. Andrew V.C., as he then was, and his 22nd Battalion have been blamed by some historians for the loss of Crete. Many of these should have known better, especially those employed in the New Zealand War History Branch of Internal Affairs Department, who had access to all records and reports from New Zealand, British and German sources.

This accusation is false. It may have been deliberate or, more generously, the result of careless investigation. There have been suggestions by some writers that Andrew was set up as a scapegoat.

The truth is that Lt.Col. Andrew, with his 22nd Bn at Maleme, Col Ian Campbell with two Australian battalions at Retimo, and the British Brigade of the 2nd Black Watch, the 2nd Yorks and Lancs, the 2nd Leicesters and the 2/4th Australian Bn at Heraklion had won the battle of Crete by the end of the first day's fighting.

Proof of this is given by the consternation and despair of Generals Student and Lohr in their HQ at the Hotel Grande Bretagne in Athens that night. Their discussion was whether to abandon Mercury before further losses occurred or whether to make one final effort in the morning, throwing all resources into Maleme, including 600 paratroops that should have been dropped that day at Heraklion, and calling on help from Italy.

In an interview with Admiral Ansel in 1960, Student said that through the night of the 20/21st May 1941 he consoled himself with the thought "If we only get through this night.....if we only get through this night, tomorrow we can do something".

While Generals Student and Lohr and their command structure spent the night planning and praying (Student's word), on Crete all Creforce formations and units appear to have been enjoying a peaceful and confident sleep, except for Col. Andrew and his 22nd Bn.

To examine some facts of that first day's fighting as it affected the 22nd Bn, we must examine the area of defence given to Andrew and the size of the attacking force. The 22nd Bn was ordered to occupy in a static role Hill 107, the Maleme airfield and Maleme village (often confused by NZ War History Branch and consequently many historians with Pirkos), approximately 1500 yards from the eastern end of the airfield. The circumference of the 22nd Bn's position was 10 Kms.

For the attack on this position, which the Germans believed to be held by a brigade of three battalions with its Bde HQ on high territory SW of Hill 107, (where in fact our 21st Bn was), the Assault Regiment, the elite of the Parachute Division was charged. This regiment consisted of four battalions each of four companies

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(and each parachute company with 200 well equipped men), less two companies, Nos 1 and 2 of the 1st Bn., which were to land in gliders in the Canea area.

The Order of Battle was briefly:

Regiment HQ and 1st Bn (less Nos 1 and 2 Coys)

At 0715 No 3 Coy. (Plesson) with 108 men in 14 gliders to land in C Coy's 15 Platoon area on the Tavronitis delta and take out the 4 Bofors AA guns and destroy 15 Pl.

At 0715 No.4 Coy. with Bn. HQ (Koch) with 120 men in 15 gliders to land either side of Hill 107, take it and attack the airfield from the south.

At 0730 Braun, the Regt's Second in Command, with 80 men, some from HQ and others from No.3 Bn. in 9 gliders, to land alongside Tavronitis bridge, seize it and prevent demolition, and help Plesson.

Nos. 2 and 4 Bns. to land in safe ground West of Tavronitis, collect equipment including Mortars, Machine guns, A/Tank weapons and motor cycles and close to the river bank for the main assault on the airfield.

No.1 Bn. landed as planned, both time and place, and took a considerable bashing. Their casualties were very heavy, especially their senior officers.

Nos. 2 and 4 Bns. landed as planned in the safe area West of Tavronitis. These eight well equipped companies kept C and D Coys. in particular very busy all that day. Later in the afternoon two of these companies were sent to the south of Hill 107 to attack up the southern slopes through A and B Coys.

No.3 Bn's plan was to drop on the coastal strip East of the airfield, that is the area of Maleme and Pírgos villages, and attack the airfield. Major Scherber, the C.O. of this Bn, fearing that he might lose many men in the sea by sticking to this flight plan of flying along the coast, changed the plan to drop the paratroops on a northern leg towards the coast. He was unaware of the concentration of the 21st and 23rd Bns in concealment on this route. Approximately 400, that is about half of his Bn, were destroyed by the 21st and 23rd Bns. Of the remainder, many were killed by A. and B. Coys of the 22nd Bn. and the rest, who landed as planned along the coastal strip in the vicinity of Maleme village, suffered heavily at the hands of HQ Coy. 22nd Bn.

Perhaps the destruction of the major part of this No.3 Bn. was a mixed blessing. While it was, in the short term, good news for Andrew it resulted in Brig Hargest's belief, based on enthusiastic reports from Leckie in 23rd Bn, and Allen in the 21st, that all was well up front. Hargest could not have been aware of the two battalions of very well equipped paratroops about to launch their attack on Hill 107 and the airfield.

By mid-day, Andrew was getting worried. His requests for the counter-attack by flag signals and Verey flares were either not seen or ignored. His personal visit to Col. Leckie about mid-afternoon (mentioned by only one historian and not mentioned in the official history) had no result. Andrew did not make the dangerous and fatiguing journey on foot to Leckie's HQ for a cup of tea. His journey failed to produce a result.

By 5 pm, now very alarmed, he ordered his own counter-attack with his "secret weapon", the two I. Tanks from the Repair Depot in Egypt, plus the by now weakened 14 Plat. The leading tank reached the dry river bed but was soon put out of action. The

Why Maleme was Lost (Contd)

second turned about before reaching the Tavronitis and disappeared eastward. Of 14 Platoon, only Lt Haddon Donald, wounded, four unwounded soldiers plus another four wounded ones, returned from this forlorn and desperate venture.

About 6 pm and with the No.18 set working briefly, Andrew appealed once more for help. Brig. Hargest told him that he would send some reinforcements, namely one company from the 23rd Bn and one company from the 28th (Maori) Bn.

By 9 pm, neither of these companies had arrived, not that their presence would have been of much help. The 28th (Maori) Bn was located some miles away to the East and no-one of this magnificent battalion had ever been as far West as Maleme airfield. But the 23rd and 21st Bns had been sited where they were for the single purpose of counter-attacking either on the beach or the airfield, and reconnaissance of the routes of approach to the 22nd Bn. positions had been carried out by the former CO and IO of the 23rd Bn, Lt Col Falconer and Capt Bassett, but not I think by Leckie and Davin, who now held these appointments. (It will be noted that when the counter-attack was launched before dawn on the 22nd May, almost 48 hours after the German attack began, it was launched by two battalions, the 20th and the 28th, both unfamiliar with the Maleme sector and with some miles of an approach march through unknown territory to their start line). Furthermore, the 20th Bn. had to await the arrival and then the takeover of its position by the 2/7th Bn of the A.I.F, which had to move during a heavy air attack, from Georgeopolis, several miles East of Canea. Why the reluctance to use the 23rd Bn? There was no question of the valour or morale of the men in the 23rd. One only has to study their splendid performance at Galatas a few days later.

At this time of 9 pm, Andrew realised the hopelessness of his position. In spite of a considerable loss of men in his battalion, believed by Andrew to be over 75% of the unit strength, it had held its position during fierce fighting, it had destroyed great numbers of the Assault Regiment in each of its four battalions and it still denied the airfield to the Germans.

The battle had been won! All that was now needed was for the 5th Brigade to mop up the surviving paratroops - a counter-attack by one battalion of fresh troops would have achieved this, and the 23rd Bn was fresh after having completed its hectic "duck shoot" by 11 am and having lost only seven men killed. Alternatively, a replacement battalion to come under Andrew's command for another day might have had a similar result, namely the denying of the airfield to the Germans.

Without such a force Andrew's position was hopeless. Although his orders were to hang on at all costs he believed that with the loss of his three forward companies apart from one half of one platoon on the airfield and with his weakened A and B Coys now under siege to the South of Hill 107 the cost had now been met. To remain with his few survivors on the hill and the airport to be killed or rounded up soon after first light was worth doing only if there was a chance of receiving support during the night. This, apparently, had been denied him. He ordered the withdrawal. But it was not a battalion which he withdrew, but a group of very tired soldiers who felt betrayed that, after their terrific battle and the loss of so many of their comrades, there was no effort being made to capitalise on their great victory, retain possession of the airfield and permit the recovery of their badly wounded friends.

At 2.30 am on the 21st May, Col. Andrew was once again at Leckie's HQ, this time with Lt.Col. Allen of the 21st Bn and Capt Dawson, the Brigade Major. Was he still

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pleading for the counter-attack? I think that he was. But the decision taken at the meeting of the three battalion commanders and the Brigade Major was that the 5th Brigade would hold the present position of 21st and 23rd Bns that day.

And so at daylight, the Germans, relieved at facing no counter-attack, found themselves with an unexpected bonus - an operational airfield. Within a few hours, the 5th Mountain Division was arriving and moving directly into battle.

STAN JOHNSON

NEWSLETTERS WELCOMED

We send out about 380 copies of each issue of this Newsletter. They go to every former member of the Battalion in the Auckland province for whom we have a current address, including quite a number who have moved to other parts of New Zealand or to overseas addresses. We also send copies to other Unit Associations in Auckland and (in bulk) to other branches of the Association that have expressed interest in distributing them among their own members. They reimburse us for the costs involved. I'm sure that all recipients of the newsletters are aware of the time spent in producing them - by the contributors of articles and by the editor, who has the time-consuming task of obtaining the material, editing it and deciding on how much there is room for in the limited space available, as well as writing some of it himself. The work involved and the time spent is made well worth while by the expressions of thanks received from individual members and from the other branches. For example, Wanganui Branch Secretary LES CLARK sent us some extracts from the Minutes of their Branch AGM held last April, the meeting having resolved to send "congratulations to Auckland Branch for publishing such an excellent magazine." Message received and greatly appreciated.

The editor also being the Branch Treasurer, he has to concern himself too with the cost of typing, printing and mailing the newsletters, these costs looming large in our budget. The money comes from our members' subscriptions and donations. We don't send out sub. accounts, leaving it to our members to contribute according to their financial circumstances, those with very limited incomes being excused from any payment. The response to the request in our last issue was, as usual, most heartening. We received more than one donation in 3 figures and a substantial number of \$10 payments (sub. plus \$5 donation). Our grateful thanks to everyone who responded to the request for funds. There are still about 40 to 50 people in our Branch area who can and should send in their \$5 subs. for the current financial year and a reply slip for their use is provided below.

November, 1991

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AUCKLAND 6

I enclose the sum of \$_____, being current annual subscription (\$5.00) and/or donation \$_____.

Name & address (block letters):- _____