

"Vrai et Fort"

22nd Battalion Association

AUCKLAND BRANCH

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Secretary:

C. W. Randerson

BRANCH NEWSLETTER

P.O. Box ~~13458~~ 26-314

Onehunga,
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APRIL, 1992

BRANCH SOCIAL FUNCTION - SUNDAY, 26TH APRIL, 1992

Our annual Branch get-together is being held a bit later than usual this year, partly because it seemed advisable to allow a reasonable time to elapse after the Palmerston North National Reunion in February. As this is now our one and only Branch do in the year, your Committee is expecting an attendance of at least 50. We had almost that many last year, including members, their wives and a few visitors from as far north as Kaiwaka and from as far south as the Bay of Plenty. These gatherings are always very enjoyable and Grey Lynn R.S.C. has a good caterer. It is very much worth your while to make the small effort needed to be there, even if you have to give up some of your normal Sunday activities. The Bowls season must surely be over and, as far as we know, there's no major sports event scheduled for the 26th. There is, of course, the big Rugby match at Eden Park the day before (Anzac Day), which will give us another topic of conversation.

As in past years, the function will be almost entirely social in character. We do have to hold our AGM but that should be disposed of pretty quickly. The caterer has held the luncheon cost at \$14 per head (same as last year and the year before) and this will also be the cost of admission. We do ask you to send pre-payments by mail, using the Reply Slip at the end of this Newsletter. This gives us the essential numbers that the caterer must have and also saves the Treasurer a great deal of unnecessary work at the door. If you can't possibly make it, please send back the Reply Slip in any case, enclosing your sub. payment for the 1992/93 financial year and any further contribution to our funds you may wish to make.

VENUE:

Grey Lynn Returned Services Club
1 Francis Street, Grey Lynn

TIMES:

Assemble at:- 11 a.m.
Luncheon:- 1 p.m. (approx)
Close down:- 3 p.m.

VISITORS (your friends and relatives) are more than welcome.

THE COST:- \$14 per head (plus subscription - \$5 per annum).

Drinks from the Bar will be available throughout and Wine for lunch will also be on sale.

NUMBERS FOR CATERER:- We MUST have catering numbers in advance. PLEASE FILL IN THE Reply Slip PRONTO and send it with your remittance in time to reach the Treasurer by Friday, 17th April.

ROLL OF HONOUR

6260	T.G. (Gerry) FOWLER	New Plymouth	15/1/92
6215	W.G. (Bill) JUDE	Levin	14/12/91
501420	R.H. (Bob) JONES	Taihape	28/12/91
40494	M.H. (Mal) LINKLATER	Auckland	27/9/91
33511	R.J. MORGAN	Tauranga	17/8/91
240123	M.N. (Maurice) REEVE	Auckland	30/5/91
62194	T.A. (Tom) REYNOLDS	Perth	24/4/91
41611	A.B. THOMSON	Waihi Beach	4/11/91

The above record of 22nd Battalion men who have died in recent months is limited to those in our Branch area and is compiled from the 'Last Post' lists circulated by DENNY REIDY of Palmerston North, who continues to do a wonderful job as the Keeper of the National Roll. The above list includes the names of two men from outside our area who were widely known and highly respected in the Battalion:- GERRY FOWLER and BILL JUDE, both of whom died after long periods of illness. Almost as well known was MAL LINKLATER, who was one of our Branch Presidents and served on the Branch Committee for many years. A keen sportsman in his younger days, Mal played in the 1st XV for Wellington College and was no mean exponent of the art of boxing. He was commissioned during the war and left the Battalion at that time. Our branch was well represented at his funeral service.

MAURICE REEVE distinguished himself on several occasions in the Italian campaign and got an immediate MM after leading his section of 7 Platoon in strong and successful charges in the Savio River sector. The editor apologises for getting things wrong in the last Newsletter about that well-known personality - T.A. (Tom) REYNOLDS. Sadly, Tom did pass away in Australia almost a year ago. His body was brought back to Pukekohe and was given a very well attended burial service in the area where Tom lived for so many years.

SHAVETAIL LIEUTENANTS

In January, 1941, I entered Trentham Military Camp as a very raw recruit, and quickly became friendly with HARTLEY KIRSCHBERG, one of the other 'buck' Privates in my platoon; he lives in Rotorua nowadays. Hartley and I had a lot in common and enjoyed many chats together when off parade, not always to the approval of our platoon commander, Bob Henry (not his real name). Bob was a very pleasant fellow in his early twenties, in our opinion, was doing his best but had his limitations in the job he had been given to do. At that time, the only groundfighting in progress in any part of the world was the battle in East Africa between British and Italian forces and I had a copy of "Time" Magazine that gave a detailed report on that campaign. I was intrigued by the "Time" reporter's use of the phrase 'shavetail Lieutenants' to describe many of the young and inexperienced British Army officers taking part in the battle. Hartley and I discussed that part of the report during a break from our training and felt that we knew just what 'shavetail' meant. We were having a bit of a laugh about this when our Lieutenant came over to us and asked, in his polite and friendly way, what we found so amusing. I would have preferred not to give an honest answer to his question but there seemed to be no option, so I told him what the "Time" report had to say. "What do they mean by a 'shavetail' Lieutenant" Bob asked. I replied:- "We're not exactly sure, Sir, but we think they mean one who is not yet dry behind the ears". Bob said no more and quietly walked away, leaving me a little remorseful that I had been so frank.

SHAVETAIL LIEUTENANTS (CONT/D)

Much later in the piece, in Italy about the middle of 1944, I heard an old soldier ('old' in terms of experience) refer to the young Lieutenant who had recently taken over command of his platoon as 'Lance-Jack'. I was puzzled by this nickname and asked the speaker why he called the officer by that name. His reply was that Lance-Corporal was the highest rank the officer in question was qualified to hold.

Looking back all these years later, I think it needs saying that some of our officers and N.C.O.'s were natural leaders who adapted quickly to any new role and that most of the others showed the ability to develop their own potential while actually doing and learning the job. Others again had actual or potential leadership capabilities but preferred for their own reasons not to accept the responsibility of a higher rank. There were very few indeed who failed to measure up when the chips were down. Apart from a handful of professionals, we were all civilians in uniform who were given unaccustomed tasks to perform. The vast majority, in all ranks from Private upwards, performed extremely well in whatever roles fell to their lot and were able to return home with justifiable pride in themselves and in their Army units.

Cedric Randerson

NATIONAL REUNION - PALMERSTON NORTH

After at least a week of heavy rain, the clouds over Palmerston North cleared away by about 10 a.m. on Saturday, February 22nd and it was beautifully fine and sunny for the rest of the weekend. The 23rd National Reunion of our Association was a most successful and enjoyable one and full marks go to FRED FIELD, NITA MENHENNET and the other members of the Reunion Committee for the way they planned and organised the function and overcame the problems they encountered along the way. The number attending was just under 400, well below the total of over 500 at the 50th Anniversary Reunion in Wellington two years ago but this was fully expected. Our ranks are thinning as the years pass by and it was great that so many were able and willing to make the trip to Palmerston North. At a rough guess, about 230 former members of the Battalion were there and about 200 of them took part in the march-past after the memorial service. Between 30 and 40 men from the Auckland Branch area were present, a good muster considering the distance most of them had to travel. A show of hands at the Sunday luncheon indicated that about 20 per cent of the men present were still under 70 years old, which means that they were under 23 years of age when the war ended. This points to a need to make full use of the services of the "young guns" (including J Force) in the running of future National Reunions.

Among the real oldies (80 and over) at Palmerston North, it was good to see that Padre DAVID THORPE (86) is still going strong. He read one of the lessons at the memorial service. Our Branch Patron, DOUG FROGGATT of Tauranga, gave the address at the Sunday luncheon and, as in Auckland in 1988, his talk was so well composed and put across that he had the undivided attention of his audience. We will publish it in our Newsletter as soon as we can. Many of us filled in some spare time during the weekend by visiting the RUGBY MUSEUM, which is run by volunteers, prominent among whom is a former member of our Branch, AUSTIN RIDDELL. It was appropriate that, during the Reunion weekend, the Museum was displaying a record of JACK SULLIVAN's All Black career, including an article from our Newsletters,

NATIONAL REUNION (CONT/D)

1994 NATIONAL REUNION:- This will be held in Hastings. The incoming National President is ALF GEORGE and the National Secretary is BRIAN BROOKER.

POSTSCRIPT TO CRETE DEBATE

Since our October issue, which contained a detailed rebuttal of the Canard that Maleme was lost because of a wrong decision by Lt.Col. L.W. ANDREW, our defence of his reputation has received strong backing from an unexpected source. TONY SIMPSON, who published his book on the battle of Crete 10 years ago, revealed in a radio interview that the true story behind the loss of Maleme had not till then been told. The radio interview was reported by several newspapers, one of which used this headline:- "BLAME FOR CRETE FALLS ON WRONG KIWI COLONEL". Simpson's informant of a decade ago was Major H. THOMASON, who was with 23rd Battalion on Crete but Simpson was asked not to publicise the story until Thomason and a handful of others involved had died. The story that did not appear in Simpson's "Operation Mercury" was that the then C.O. of 23rd Battalion "had gone to pieces when the shooting started, had gone into his bunker and had refused to come out or to give orders of any sort". Because of this, the pre-arranged counter-attack by 23rd Battalion never took place and Lt.Col. Andrew was compelled to withdraw what was left of 22nd Battalion from positions that had become untenable in the face of the overwhelming German forces attacking his sector. At the end of the interview, Simpson summed up by saying:- "It's time Andrew was exonerated".

GESTURE OF GRATITUDE

(With acknowledgements to Rotorua Daily Post)

After World War Two when old soldiers got together at unit reunions many Crete veterans expressed thoughts that something could be done for the people who had risked so much to help fugitive soldiers particularly in mountain areas remote from the main centres.

Enquiries were made through UNESCO and Save the Children Fund and a scheme came to light in that children from villages and hamlets of inland Crete could be educated beyond what was available in village schools. If funds were available selected children could be brought to the centres such as Chania, Rethimnon and Heraklion for post-primary schooling and if feasible to the mainland of Greece for tertiary advancement. Consequently, at Reunions of 2NZEF units in New Zealand, particularly during the 50's, 60's and 70's a Crete fund was always promoted and some of us were able to trace the progress of our prodigies as they took advantage of the opportunities that would otherwise not have come their way. It is not known how many young Cretans had their education advanced in this way but an intriguing incident took place when some of us had a stay in Crete during an 1985 ex-servicemen's tour to Greece, Crete and Italy revisiting the places we knew 40 years previously.

We were nearing the end of our sojourn in Maleme in a splendid hotel right beside the airfield which had seen such struggles in 1941. One of our number, Ian Bodle of Whangarei, became rather ill with a heart condition and we deemed it advisable to get a doctor as soon as possible.

GESTURE OF GRATITUDE (CONT/D)

The management of the hotel did their best and after some time a youngish doctor arrived and was able to attend to Ian's needs immediately. He spoke excellent English and recommended that Ian get to hospital in Chania as quickly as an ambulance could be summoned. While we were waiting for its arrival Ian suddenly collapsed and the doctor and I administered Cardiac massage for up to half an hour before he, the doctor, decided that Ian was beyond help. This, of course, was a tremendous shock to all of us and brought a pall of sadness to an otherwise joyous venture. The doctor had to hurry away as I was thanking him he mentioned he owed his education to people from our part of the world and then rushed off. This intriguing piece of information took some time to sink in and although efforts to locate him were made, we had to leave Maleme for the other end of Crete the next day and were not able to pursue the matter.

Thus another link was provided for the happy associations that are still evident between the peoples of these islands and one so very far away. Even though the doctor's efforts were unsuccessful it is perhaps a comforting thought that what originated as a gesture of gratitude could have a sad but satisfying conclusion over 40 years later.

JACK ('SCOTTY') McMILLAN

INCIDENT AT GAZALA

"SCOTCH" PATERSON, the writer of some reminiscences of the Italian campaign that appeared in our March, 1991 issue and made very interesting reading, has suggested to me that I write something similar about the desert campaign, especially about an incident in Libya in December, 1941 in which I was involved as a member of 9 Platoon. When the Battalion History was being compiled, I thought quite a bit about doing a write-up on that incident but, in the end, decided against it, partly because I felt that 9 Platoon had not exactly covered itself with glory at Gazala. The two withdrawals or retreats (from the same enemy strongpoint) in which I took part, though they were well-disciplined ones, were not really the stuff that makes military history. All these years later, the story can and should be told.

When we moved into Libya in November, 1941 for 'Operation Crusader', the Division was immediately split up, 4th & 6th Brigades plus 21 Battalion of 5th Brigade being sent forward to SIDI REZEGH, near TOBRUK, while the rest of 5th Brigade (including 22, 23 & Maori Battalions) operated in the general area of the frontier forts, SIDI AZIZ and MENASTIR, the last being a locality on the coast road part way between BARDIA & TOBRUK. During the last two weeks of November, the N.Z. casualties at Sidi Rezegh, where the 25 pounders were firing at Rommel's Panzers over open sights, were so severe (about 1 in 4) that our Units there had to be withdrawn from the campaign. 5th Brigade had had much lighter casualties and continued to take part in the campaign until about December 17, when 'Libya 1941' ended with the AFRIKA KORPS's withdrawal to the west.

The Battalion was at MENASTIR twice, with instructions to prevent enemy traffic using the coast road, a task that was carried out most effectively. The first time, we were there on our own, with Artillery, A/Tank & Vickers support, until Brigade H.Q. and our B. Company were over-run by a Panzer Division at SIDI AZIZ, about 5 miles inland and we had to make a hazardous night withdrawal from what had become a very isolated and untenable spot. Some days later, we and the other

INCIDENT AT GAZALA (CONT/D)

two Battalions (with Lt.Col. Andrew as acting Brigadier) went back to Menastir, where the Maori Battalion in particular had a field day at the expense of a large enemy convoy. Then it was back to the FORT CAPUZZO area, from where on December 11 we marched 10 miles to the west before being picked up by R.M.T. trucks for the move to GAZALA, some miles west of Tobruk, there to rejoin the rest of 8th Army (what was left of it) in its confrontation with what was left of Rommel's battered forces. LES ANDREW was back with us as Battalion C.O.; (Maj.) JOHN MOORE was O.C. A Company, with (Capt) ERL PLEASANTS as his 2 I.C., and (Lt) LLOYD CROSS, a graduate of Duntroon Military College, was in command of 9 Platoon. At that time, A Company's ranks included such well-known Rugby personalities as MICK KENNY, LIN THOMAS, HARTLEY KIRSCHBERG and PAUL DONOGHUE.

The R.M.T. took us as far as they could and we then debussed and went forward on foot, ready for action. We in 9 Platoon had gone some distance when several of us drew attention to a group of 20 to 30 enemy soldiers and a truck or two about half-a-mile to the left of our line of advance. They were paying no attention at all to our presence and we were sure that they were Italians. Four of us (all Privates) were delegated to do a recce and bring back a report. The rest of the platoon were to give us covering fire. The other three were JOE WALL, HARTLEY KIRSCHBERG and another whose name I can't remember, so I will call him Bert.

Our four-man patrol moved towards the enemy group in open order. We had heard many stories about Italian soldiers surrendering by the hundreds and thousands and we were convinced that all we had to do was to round this lot up. As we advanced, the enemy trucks disappeared over a low rise and the soldiers went to ground. Then, when we were about 50 yards from their position, a hail of rifle and machine-gun fire descended upon us. We hit the deck as one man but Joe was wounded in the arm and Hartley in the leg. When the firing stopped, we four conferred as we lay flat on the sand and agreed that we were all capable of making a retreat till we could shelter behind a fold in the ground, so we crawled backwards on our tummies for some distance, hampered by the fact that we were wearing great-coats. As soon as we could, Bert and I bandaged our wounded with shell-dressings and then we all retired from the danger zone and went right back to Company H.Q., where I reported to John Moore, giving him our assessment of the position of the enemy strongpoint and the strength of its fire-power. We were sure that they had heavier weapons than rifles and L.M.G.s - probably at least the Italian equivalent of our Vickers guns.

Joe and Hartley having been entrusted to more competent hands than ours, Bert and I rejoined our platoon. It had long since disappeared from sight but we found it without much searching. The sequel was that, a couple of days later, 9 Platoon was ordered to make a platoon attack on that same strongpoint. We were to have Artillery and Vickers support and our attack was to go in at first light (it should really have been a night attack). In the absence of landmarks or other guide-lines, the platoon veered slightly to the left as it went forward and we were told later that this prevented the Vickers guns from giving us any supporting fire. In due course, the Italians turned on the same hail of fire as before and there were no complaints from the platoon when the order was given to make a tactical withdrawal. This was done in drill-book style, each section in turn firing from a kneeling position while the other sections moved back. Miraculously, there were no casualties from the intense enemy fire. After Rommel decided to call the battle off and withdrew his forces westward, we inspected that redoubtable

INCIDENT AT GAZALA (CONT/D)

strongpoint. There were four trenches in two wide V.s and the trenches were of full World War 1 depth, with fire-steps. At the apex of each V was a circular gun-pit large enough to accommodate a heavy machine-gun and its crew. It would indeed have been a tough nut to crack in a daylight attack.

Cedric Randerson

DAY OF RESPECT
(ROTORUA DAILY POST - MAY, 1991)

With the celebration of the 50th anniversary of the Battle of Crete, an episode on that historic island comes to mind. During a post-retirement trip by a group of ex-soldiers in 1985 we spent a week on Crete, our visiting coinciding with the anniversary of the German invasion in 1941. We soon realised that the Cretan people, every May, "celebrate" days when Hitler's paratroopers descended in their hundreds on the hills and plains of the lovely isle.

It appears that a town or village is selected each year and in 1985 it was the turn of the mountain village of Kandanos to be host to the national president, many heads of Government and heads of the three services. This large group had journeyed from the Greek mainland some days before this particular Sunday. The Cretan equivalent of the NZRSA had invited us to be part of this ceremony and we left our hotel in Maleme not quite knowing what to expect.

As our bus approached the town after a tortuous journey through the Western Mountains we noted that many hundreds of people were heading in the same direction. We went as far as we could when the density of the people made it necessary to complete the journey on foot.

The main reason for selection of Kandanos was an incident in 1943 when a large contingent of German troops descended without warning on the town and herded the entire population into the square. They demanded that the town authorities reveal the whereabouts of a group of partisans who had been harassing the invaders for some weeks, disappearing into the mountains after each foray.

The town elders refused so the Germans lined up every man and boy available and proceeded to shoot every 10th one. They then brought in bulldozers and flattened every building within a kilometre of the town centre.

I had a New Zealand flag which I carried rather tentatively as we walked towards the town centre. Strange to say, recognition of the flag was immediate. I was thrust towards the front, holding it aloft while the people around us applauded and made way for the bewildered group of middle-aged ex-soldiers and their spouses to head for what proved to be a beautifully rebuilt church.

As in all Greek Orthodox places of worship every space is decorated with religious paintings matched only by the ornate vestments of the dozen or so clergy who emerged from behind the splendidly decorated altar.

One of my companions inquired if this was likely to be a lengthy service and my guess was "most likely". However very shortly proceedings ended and after the president and his entourage left the church we were invited to follow. As we descended a long stairway we could see the town laid out before us with a huge throng making a passage for the dignitaries, including us, to the town square near the wall where the executions took place. This wall is now a memorial.

DAY OF RESPECT (CONT/D)

What followed was a very moving ceremony culminating with, to our astonishment the National Anthems of Greece, Great Britain, Australia and New Zealand. We were then invited to join in the VIP luncheon, which made us realise with what admiration and respect New Zealand is held in Crete. The whole day was a most enlightening experience and I don't doubt that those New Zealand soldiers and ex-soldiers visiting Crete this month will have an unforgettable trip.

JACK ('SCOTTY')McMILLAN

REPORT FROM THE TREASURER

The Treasurer (who is also the Secretary) of Auckland Branch, as well as being the editor of these Newsletters, is very pleased to report that, thanks to the generous response to the request for funds in our October issue, there is every prospect that we will be able to continue meeting the cost of typing, printing and mailing the Newsletters in the foreseeable future. The Branch Annual Accounts for the year ended February, 1992 will be presented on 26th April and my rough calculations indicate that they will show a modest surplus for the year and a satisfactory reserve for funds to keep the show afloat.

We stopped sending out subscription accounts several years ago (to save costs), leaving it to our members to contribute according to their means, those with very limited incomes being excused from any payment. Most of the others respond heart-warmingly to the general requests we send out and, once again, the mailman has in the past few months brought us many reply slips, cheques and complimentary remarks. The Branch Committee thanks everyone concerned for their support and encouragement. We are now in a new financial year, so subscriptions are due again. The sub. amount (\$5) has remained unchanged for the past five years but we know that many of you will pay extra by way of donation. Some of our more affluent members send in quite substantial donations, which are very gratefully received.

22nd Battalion Assn.,
Box 26-314,
AUCKLAND 3

April, 1992

Branch Social Function - 26th April 1992

I enclose the sum of \$ _____, BEING

(1) Entrance fee for _____ people on 26th April at
\$14 per head

- \$

AND/OR (2) My 1992/93 subscription (& Arrears/Donation)

- \$

TOTAL

- \$

NAME (block letters):- _____

ADDRESS:- _____

(Please return by 17th April)