

"Vrai et Fort"

22nd Battalion Association

AUCKLAND BRANCH

Telephone 523-1310

Secretary :

C. W. Randerson

BRANCH NEWSLETTER

P.O. Box 26-314

Epsom,

Auckland, 3.

MARCH, 1993

BRANCH SOCIAL FUNCTION - SUNDAY, 28TH MARCH 1993

Here we are again - all set for the annual get-together of the Branch of our Association that stretches all the way from North Cape to Taihape (or thereabouts). Your Branch Committee cordially invites you all to join them at the Grey Lynn R.S.C. on the last Sunday of this month and confidently predicts that we will have an excellent muster of our members and their wives and friends, including those who will come from Northland, Waikato, Bay of Plenty and such like places. While we may not be quite as mobile as we used to be, it's well worth making the small effort to be there and we need to remember that some of the others will be disappointed if we don't show up. In the period before lunch, we will be able to watch the official Video of the Alamein 50th Anniversary celebration of last October. It runs for 20 minutes and is well worth watching.

Apart from the Video, the proceedings will be fairly informal, as usual. There's a new caterer since last year but we hear that the high standard has been maintained, while the luncheon cost is also the same - \$14 per head. PLEASE use the Reply Slip at the end of this Newsletter to send your pre-payment by mail. This gives us the essential numbers for the caterer and cuts out the unnecessary handling of cash at the door. Please send back the Reply Slip in any case, enclosing your subscription payment for the 1993/94 financial year and any further donation to our funds you may feel able to make.

VENUE:-

Grey Lynn Returned Services Club,
1 Francis Street, Grey Lynn.

TIMES:-

Assemble at:- 11 a.m. (prompt)
Luncheon:- Somewhere in between
Close down:- 3 p.m.

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

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

BAR:- Drinks will be available throughout and Wine for lunch will also be on sale.

NUMBERS FOR CATERER:- We MUST supply catering numbers in advance. PLEASE FILL IN THE REPLY SLIP NOW and send it with your remittance in time to reach the Treasurer by Monday, 22nd March.

ROLL OF HONOUR

41086	G.W. BOURNE	Taihape	1/8/92
294995	A. BULLOCK	Rotorua	5/10/92
439276	R.F. (RAY) COOK	Napier	14/1/93
33635	J.H. (JOHN) DYMOCK	Gisborne	2/9/92
423530	A.H. (ARTHUR) REVELL	Taupo	11/12/92
	W. WYNNE MASON	Guildford, U.K.	30/12/92

Roll of Honour (Continued)

RAY COOK will be remembered by those who were in 7 Platoon from Faenza northwards. (Major) ARTHUR REVELL, who died from cancer at the age of 84, will be remembered by the many who knew him well during the campaign in Italy. JOHN DYMOCK was a well-known and well-respected platoon commander in the Battalion during the desert period and stayed around for part of the Italian campaign. He was named in the Battalion history as a member of the unofficial 'SAN SEVERO CLUB', which was instigated by (2/Lt.) EARL CROSS and came into being in a Casa in the SALAROLA area (SANGRO front) one wintry night in December, 1943. The club comprised (mainly) junior officers and a few lesser mortals. Lyrics were composed, disrespectful of one or other of the club's members (and some non-members too), and were sung to the tune of 'Ball of Yarn'. Other well-known club members included:- BUNTY COWPER, FRANK WHEELER, RUSTY CARSON and (Sgt.) FRANK KERRIGAN. Just as well the war sometimes had its lighter side.

WYNNE MASON was one of 3 schoolmasters from Hutt Valley High School who joined the Battalion in Trentham Camp at the beginning of 1940. He was appointed Bn. I.O. but, a few months after the 22nd reached England, he was transferred to 5th Brigade H.Q. as Bde. I.O. In Crete, where he won the MC, Mason was promoted to Staff Capt. by Brig. Hargest and he still held that appointment when Brigade HQ and B. Coy. of 22 Bn. were over-run by ROMMEL and one of his Panzer Divisions at SIDI AZIZ in Libya on 27/11/41. Together with STAN JOHNSON and the other B. Coy and Bde. HQ officers, Mason was taken to Italy by submarine and spent the rest of the war as a P.O.W. After the war, he joined the N.Z. diplomatic service and, later on, was Deputy Director-General of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission for 14 years.

WERE YOU HERE IN 1941?

A former member of 22nd Battalion who has a highly interesting story to tell about his escape from a P.O.W. camp in Greece and then back to Egypt is ROBIN SINCLAIR of Opotiki. Robin was severely wounded during the battle for MALEME Airfield in Crete, was taken prisoner, spent some time in a German field hospital in Crete and was then transferred to another German hospital, in Greece, then to a P.O.W. camp in Greece from which he escaped; he was helped by Greek civilians and finally fled from Greece by sea, sailing across the Mediterranean until picked up by a British Destroyer and landed safely in Egypt - "to be home by Christmas". That's the bare bones of the story and there were a lot of gaps to be filled in. Incidentally, two of Robin's companions on the boat trip were ROY FARRAN of "Winged Dagger" fame and a British Staff-Sergeant who was, I understand, responsible for condensing drinking water from the sea, using wood from the boat's interior as fuel.

Pending that fuller report, Robin first gave us very brief accounts of two incidents that happened while he was a P.O.W., as well as the full story of an unexpected meeting of the "What a small world it is" type. The first of the two incidents happened when Robin was in a German field hospital in Crete. A wounded Gerry soldier came in, saw Robin lying there and came over looking as pleased as Punch:- "I shot you", he said; "I was up an olive tree". 'You can imagine how pleased I was', says Robin! He had shot off the right side of my face. It hadn't fully healed when I escaped and it took 18 months more, back in New Zealand, to mend'.

The second incident happened when Robin was escaping from the P.O.W. camp in Greece - at night. 'A bloody roving guard caught me when I was flat out, crawling on guts, knees, etc. for the fence. He put his torch on - shone it from my heels to my head and me - Joe Brown - looking up at his beam and his rifle on his shoulder, wondering and waiting for a bullet. The bloke put his torch off for a moment or

Were you here in 1941 (continued)

two and by then - or a little later - I was OUT - and home for Xmas!!!' You can see what I mean by the big gaps that had to be filled in. (Ed.)

Now for the story with no major gaps. In 1981, Robin and his wife went to Crete with a group tour for the 40th anniversary of the battle. 'We were in the German Cemetery at the north wall parapet, looking down to Maleme Aerodrome and my "small front at west end, extending from the Tavronitis bridge 1400 yards to the sea". For that 1400 yards, I had a platoon of 28 bods; 1 Bren; 1 - 1914 Mag. Lewis Gun mounted for anti-aircraft. West and in front of this position was the dry Tavronitis River bed - right across my front - plus about 25 Gliders landed! I had taken a drawing of all this for the benefit of my wife Judy should we visit Maleme. And now as it happened we were there!

'I had put my drawing/sketch on the perimeter stone wall and was pointing out to Judy all the salient points. There was a chap standing next to us here and I felt, while describing to Judy what had gone on 40 years previously, that he was taking quite a bit of interest in my descriptions. He had a white stiff collar on - back to front - in other words he was a parson - as we know them. After a moment or two, he said to me:- "Were you here in 1941?" 'I then explained to him more fully exactly where we had been and he responded by asking me:- "do you know how I got past your position?" 'He was the bloke - probably ex-glider as the paratroops were non est - who led whatever men he had by crawling down the river bed to the sea. He said that they went into the sea up to their necks, carrying their weapons above their heads. They then worked their way along in the sea to come up and be able to fire upon my position from behind. Where they came up out of the water must have been about where Haddon Donald had had his platoon'.

'Judy said to this German parson:- "What happened to you after all this?" 'He replied that they were re-trained as plain infantrymen and that most of them had finished up on the Russian front. We all agreed there was absolutely no future in this; hence his later reply that all these experiences led him to what he had to take up - the only thing possible - to go into the Church. What would anyone ever believe were the chances of having such a meeting as I experienced on that occasion? - about one in a million?' (to be continued)

Robin Sinclair

JOTTINGS

EDWARD B. PATERSON, better known to his multitudes of friends, colleagues and acquaintances simply as "SCOTCH", informed us in January that he was forsaking the "Elysian fields of Waiheke Island" to make an intrepid journey of exploration into the wild wastelands of suburban Wellington, where he now lives in a flat attached to the home of his son, Mike. Scotch and his wife, Kathleen Patricia ("Pat"), moved from mainland Auckland to Waiheke several years ago, about the time he gave up full-time work as an Engineering Consultant, though he continues to devote some of his time to his specialised field (Industrial Pneumatics). Sadly, Pat became very ill and she died last July after a long illness. Much though they both loved Waiheke and the relaxed approach of its citizens to life's problems, it made good sense after his bereavement for Scotch to sell the property at Oneroa and move to where Mike and his family were living. Present address:- 44 Ottawa Road, Ngaio, Wellington - Phone (04) 479-7110.

1994 NATIONAL REUNION:- Though we have seen no recent publicity from Hawkes Bay Branch, the dates for next year's National Reunion are February 12/13, 1994. For further information, contact National Secretary BRIAN J. BROOKER, 2/403W Avenue Road, Hastings.

Jottings (Continued)

DOUG. FROGGATT:- That young-looking, fit-looking guy who has lived in Tauranga since he retired as Auckland's Chief Postmaster quite some years back gave himself and a lot of other people a shock when he reported to the hospital recently for a routine X-ray examination. He was not allowed to get off the bed but was booked in for a quadruple bypass operation that was given first place on the next operating day. He had been on digitalis for 10 years but, clearly, neither he nor his medical advisers realised how serious his heart condition had become. Doug. reported last month that "recovery is excellent. I now walk several kilometres each day and am again permitted to drive my car short distances". Address:- 28 Freyberg Street, Tauranga. Phone: (07) 576-5383.

HOME FOR CHRISTMAS(The Robin Sinclair Story)

Editor's Note:- While waiting for the fuller account of his adventures that Robin had promised to send me, I re-read much of ROY FARRAN's "Winged Dagger", especially that part of the book that dealt with his and Robin's great escape from Greece. Farran's account said that a large prison hospital on the outskirts of Athens was crammed with men wounded in the battles of Greece and Crete and was manned largely by captured British doctors and other medical personnel, under German supervision. About half a mile away was a prison camp, to which the wounded men were evacuated when convalescent. Farran escaped from the hospital, Sinclair from the POW camp. The number of German guards was not sufficient to prevent numerous escapes from both hospital and prison. Another important factor in the high incidence of escapes was the friendly attitude of most of the Greek population, many of whom risked torture and death by sheltering the escaping prisoners. A lot of them were caught, tortured and executed by the Germans.

Robin takes up the story again at the point where he was crawling towards the prison camp fence to get out under the wire when he was caught in the rays of a torch held by a guard.

THE BARBER'S POLE

'After that bloody guard caught me (though perhaps failing to see him - Ed.), he put out his torch. So, in the dark, I couldn't see him and I knew b-well he couldn't now see me. Seconds later, I went on with my crawling and got to the wire, which was pretty ineffectual stuff - about as good as a real old "Taranaki" cow fence. I bent up the bottom barb wire and crawled under it to the street beyond. It was then that I copped it. I went to stand up and couldn't. I was frozen, sitting on the ground, leaning against a barb wire standard, all my body rigid with cramp. I was virtually frozen in that position - just outside the wire on the street, 40 yards from the main gate and the guard with a floodlight over him. So I was stuck and called on patience while waiting for the cramps to wear off. In due course, I more or less came right, got up and traced my way around the roads I had studied before escaping, finally arriving at the Barber's pole'. (this was a spot pre-arranged as a meeting place with two Commando officers, who were attempting to escape at the same time but by a different route - Ed.).

'About a quarter hour later, I heard someone coming and, with a cigarette in my mouth and my hands cupped to light my face, I was pleased to find that my Commando mates were able to recognise me sitting in the ditch. THE question now was what to do next? Half past nine at night and nowhere to go! We decided that,

Home for Christmas (continued)

as the Greek people living in a corner house near the camp had on several occasions thrown the odd packet of cigarettes into the camp, they must be on "our" side. We went back to the camp fence and followed it back to the house; the camp guards were only a matter of feet away as we passed them. Up to the back door where a light shone out and some people there waved us inside; it was almost as though they were expecting us. Inside, a sort of sports-coat was handed to each of us and then someone poured us wine'.

ME AND MY GIRL

'Three girls then appeared; one of them was directed to each of us and they linked arms with us three, each couple in turn going out arm in arm. When my turn came, "my girl" and I went back to the wire (guard just the other side) and down to the main gate (guard with floodlight above). We stopped when we were less than 6 feet from and facing the guard on duty. The girl pointed into the camp and spoke flat out in Greek - probably describing everything there. It was the second occasion that night when I would have found a change of underwear a help! Moments later, we were on our way again - "promenada" - walking out!!! - and into the blackness of the night. I was taken to a house where my friends were and we slept on the cold, hard, tiled floor, or at least tried to sleep. Over the next two days, quite a few Greek people visited the house and looked us over. They selected us and we were taken to their individual homes - again under cover of night. The chap who took me could speak quite reasonable English, which was a blessing. His name was IANNIS (John) and I found he was a man of many parts. While I was living in Iannis' house, there were vacant rooms downstairs and, some days after I went there, some Germans shifted into the rooms below. Every evening Iannis used to take me down the outside stairs to the footpath, where there were usually a few Jerries hanging around. I more or less got used to them after a while - or did I? This nightly jaunt was for exercise and took us downhill to the waterfront and cafe, where we would have coffee and a cake. The Germans and their girl-friends would be at the next tables!! After a few weeks with Iannis, I had to move on as his family were nearly out of money. At my request, my host found another family who would have me. Meantime ROY FARRAN was living nearby and the place where we now were was a largish suburb of Piraeus'.

RANDOM CHECKS

Robin and other escapers spent several weeks in their next 'safe' house until it was decided that they would all go to Athens - by suburban train from Piraeus. A house for them to go to was arranged and Robin was allocated a young lady escort who they called Dolly. She bought the train tickets but, when they all started to go aboard the train, a German was seen making random checks of passengers at the turnstile and demanding identification, etc. Lack of Identity Cards was a continuing problem until both Robin and Roy were supplied with forged cards that gave them Greek names, addresses and occupations. They were duly stamped and then signed by the Head of Police at Piraeus. Clearly, he too must have been on "our" side. The state of health of both men must also have been a cause for concern. Roy Farran's severe leg wound, suffered at Galatas, Crete when he and W.B. ("Sandy") Thomas were wounded and captured at the same time, had to be given a doctor's attention. Robin Sinclair was in slightly better shape as, outwardly, his wound had healed but the bones of his jaw had never set and were still soft. Even had any decent food been available, he would not have been able to eat it.

'Life went on. We were visited by a delightful lady and found she dispensed practically everything:- money, food, clothing, etc. She was Madame Kariani, eventually tortured and shot by the Gestapo'.

Home for Christmas (continued)

There were many alarms and scares about the ever-present danger of discovery by the Germans - a danger to both the escapers and the people who sheltered and concealed them. The Greeks seemed to compensate for this risk by acting as if they hadn't a care in the world. Just before their next move (to another suburb of Athens), Robin, Roy and other "residents" were taken to local picture theatres, where they were likely to find a 'bloody' Jerry and his girlfriend sitting right next to them. 'Out in the street, when it came time to go home, the bally girls all linked arms with us and more or less forced us to join in doing the Lambeth Walk. It was a bit disconcerting'.

BUYING A BOAT

During August 1941, Sinclair & Farran became involved in discussions with members of the Greek underground about the chances of escape from Greece by sea. The owner of the house where they were now living turned out to be an ex merchant marine sea captain who was himself interested in getting a boat to get out of Greece. Farran devoted some pages of 'Winged Dagger' to an account of the negotiations that followed. He said that they had been told that several Greeks wanted to get to Egypt but didn't have enough money to hire or buy a boat; these Greeks would be prepared to take them, and a few other escapers, in the boat if they could raise some cash. According to Farran's story, there was no way in which the escapers could have got enough cash together but the purchase price was finally made up by means of promissory notes signed on behalf of the British Government. One hopes that the P.N.s were met after the war. In due course a boat was found and the purchase arranged; it was a caique, a standard type of Greek fishing boat about 18 feet long. It had a hold below deck measuring about 8 feet by 4 feet and 3 feet high. This space would have to accommodate 10 of the Greeks, plus the 5 members of the services group, now comprising 2 Englishmen, 1 New Zealander, 1 Aussie and 1 Pole:- Lieut. Robin Sinclair, 22 Battn., 2nd N.Z. Div. (aged 23); Lieut. Roy Farran, 7th Kings Own Hussars (aged 19); S/Sgt. Charles Wright, R.A.S.C.; Sgt. Major John Phillips, A.I.F.; Cpl. George Feelah, Polish Intelligence. In addition to the 15 men below deck, there would be two men up top:- the Greek sea captain (ELIAS) and another Greek to look after the diesel motor that would be the only motive power. It seemed fairly certain that the boat would be rather cramped. The underground - mainly in Piraeus - were to jack up a supply of fuel sufficient to get them to Egypt and the boat party soon got word that they were to shift back to Piraeus (by train), there to wait in hiding till all the arrangements were finalised. They spent a couple of nights at the shipowner's house and were then taken to the cellar of a house close to PHALERON BAY, "a lovely and very popular spot". During the time here, they were visited by a few other people, mainly bringing what they could spare in the way of food - generally scraps/crusts of bread and the like. As this would be all the food that they would have to take on the boat, they were most grateful to their Greek friends; it was years later before they learned that this food was given at great sacrifice by the donors.

The time spent waiting at Phaleron Bay must have kept the 5 non-Greek escapers on tenterhooks. They had to keep out of sight, leaving it entirely to their Greek friends to organise supplies of food, water and fuel. There were hitches in the delivery of fuel and a worrying postponement or two of the day of departure. Having handed over all the cash they had, Robin & Roy were very suspicious as to whether they had been "done" and worried by the thought that they could be betrayed to the Gestapo at the last moment but, at last, Elias told them the boat would leave at the crack of dawn next morning. In the pitch blackness before dawn they groped their way down to the waterfront and aboard the caique. It was deathly quiet below deck until, as dawn came, they heard the engine start and they were under way.

Home for Christmas (continued)

There were German Guardposts everywhere and there was "a helluva distance to go" before they were far enough from the Greek coast to chance a breather on deck - in fact it was 10 hours before it was safe to go up top.

VOYAGE TO FREEDOM

It had been worked out that they had enough diesel fuel to reach Alexandria in 4 days "if all went well" but, of course, all did not go well:- Navigational errors took them off course; they discovered 3 days out from Piraeus that much of their precious stock of fuel was diesel-contaminated water; a violent storm developed during the fourth night and lasted about 36 hours. The storm not only threatened to sink that boat but used up the remaining stocks of diesel fuel in keeping the boat headed in a safe direction; the waves were up to 20 feet high. So it was that, after 5 or 6 days at sea, they had no fuel and well before that, were to all intents and purposes, out of water and food. The Greek "passengers" had swiped the last of the meagre supply of bread crusts by the end of the second day. After the storm subsided, a heated argument broke out between Roy Farran and the captain. Farran persisted in saying they should steer dead south, in the general direction of Mersa Matruh, but Elias knew the Mediterranean too well to be diverted from his intention of heading straight towards Alexandria. The argument ended when Johnny Phillips (an ex P.T. Instructor) threatened to chuck Roy Farran off the boat.

Attempts had been made to paddle the boat with planks and square sails were made out of blankets but everyone was now far gone with thirst and exhaustion caused by the heat and the lack of food. They were in dire straits unless they soon met up with another vessel; even a German E-boat would seem like a gift from heaven. It was at this point that they talked about the possibility of making a distiller to convert sea water into drinking water and it was Charlie Wright's ingenuity that saw this faint hope turn into reality. He used a cut-down 4 gallon tin as a fire-box, together with various bits and pieces from the engine and what looked like a length of 2" downpipe to make a water jacket to condense the steam. The wood to make a fire came from the lining of the 8' x 4' fish hold below deck, cut up with their only tool - a small 3" blade knife. The miracle was that it worked, actually producing drinkable water - only about a couple of pints but enough to keep them all alive. Robin learned a year or two later that this was the first recorded instance of such a still being made.

With the threat of dying of thirst removed (or at least postponed), they began to think in terms of meeting another boat or a submarine. The nights were so black that the caique would never be seen, so they made a couple of flares - from old clothing soaked in sump oil. Then, 8 or 9 nights after leaving Piraeus, they heard a noise that could have been made either by a submarine or a surface vessel; hopefully, it was "one of ours" but it didn't any longer matter that much if it was an enemy vessel and it was decided to light the flares. Then they saw a great grey shape and heard a voice calling:- "put out that bloody light!" The ship was H.M.S. JACKAL, one of a 3 destroyer patrol. It was commanded by a nephew of Earl Jellicoe. Having explained who they were and after being checked out by members of the destroyer's crew they were lifted/shoved/pulled onto Jackal's deck. It was not long before they were breakfasting on bacon and eggs, after being told by the ship's M.O. not to drink water but only tea (with lots of sugar) until their stomachs normalised. So, having left Greece on September 3rd 1941, they were put ashore at Alex. on 12th September, feeling (I'm sure) very lucky to be there.

(Footnote):- Robin Sinclair's detailed escape story was too long for all of it to go in this Newsletter and, with his agreement, it has been reduced in length to fit the space available.

Home for Christmas (concluded)

After being interrogated at a Naval HQ in Alexandria for two full days, Robin was further interviewed at Maadi Camp by Col. Rudd, had further hospital treatment and returned home by hospital ship in November, 1941. In 1944, he returned to the Battalion (in Italy of course) just after Casino. (ED.).

THE TREASURER REPORTS

Once again, I am very pleased to tell you that, thanks to the generous response of many of our Branch members to the requests in the last two issues of this Newsletter, we have finished up with a small surplus (almost (\$50) in our Income & Expenditure Account for the year ended 28/2/93 and it is therefore now certain that these Newsletters can be continued for at least another 12 months - we hope that it will be a good deal longer. As you know, we no longer send out subscription accounts but rely on the former members of the Battalion who are on our mailing list to send in their subscriptions and/or donations on a regular basis. The response each year has really been excellent and your Committee is most grateful. The official sub. has remained at \$5 for the last 6 years but this is not nearly high enough to cover our Newsletter in full. The shortfall has been made up by many donations, ranging from \$5 up. We have received two 3-figure cheques in the last few months.

March, 1993

22nd Battalion Association,
PO Box 26-314,
AUCKLAND 3

Branch Social Function - 28th March, 1993

I enclose the sum of \$ _____, BEING:

(1) Entrance fee for _____ people on March 28 at \$14 per head - \$

AND/OR:

(2) My 1993/94 subscription (& Donation) - \$

Total \$

NAME (Block letters):- _____

ADDRESS:- _____

(Please return by 22nd March)