

"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 1994

BRANCH SOCIAL GATHERING - SUNDAY 10TH APRIL, 1994

We are holding our Annual Branch get-together a little later this year, mainly to allow a reasonable time to elapse after the National Reunion held in Hastings on February 12th and 13th. Our Branch district extends from North Cape south to about Taihape, making our Auckland get-togethers a bit far away for some of our members to get there but we always have people from out of town at this do, usually from North Auckland, Waikato and Bay of Plenty. Fifty of us gathered at Grey Lynn R.S.C. last year and we expect an equally good muster this time. If, like me, you're not getting any younger, please remind yourself that the opportunities for socialising in this way will not go on indefinitely. I hope I won't be accused of being in my dotage if I recall an appropriate line of poetry that has somehow stayed with me since my school days:-

"Gather ye rosebuds while ye may. Old Time is still a-flying".

As usual, the proceedings will be informal and almost entirely social in character. Please note that the caterers have reduced the luncheon charge to \$12 per head. PLEASE use the Reply Slip in this Newsletter to send your pre-payment by mail - to give us the essential numbers for the caterers and to save the Treasurer a lot of hard work at the door. Please send back the Reply Slip in any case, enclosing your sub. payment for the 1994/95 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:

<u>Assemble at:</u>	11 a.m. (promptly)
<u>Luncheon:</u>	Somewhere in between
<u>Close down:</u>	3 p.m.

VISITORS: Your friends & relatives are more than welcome.

THE COST: \$12 per head (plus Subscription - \$5 per annum).

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

NUMBERS FOR CATERERS: We MUST supply catering numbers in advance.

PLEASE FILLY IN THE REPLY SLIP NOW and send it with your remittance **BEFORE Easter** - in time to reach the Treasurer by Tuesday 5/4/94.

WE'LL MEET AGAIN

We did not have VERA LYNN there to sing to us about those war-time separations but we ex-members of 22 Battalion and our spouses/partners did meet again, and for the 24th time, at Hastings on February 12/13, 1994. And it certainly was "some sunny day" - in fact Hawkes Bay turned on three successive days of blazing hot sunshine that quickly made any motor-vehicle not under cover or in the shade feel like an oven.

Don't know if anyone has attended all 24 National Reunions. I've missed at least 6 or 7 of them but it has to be conceded that they have not lost their pulling power to draw us together at 2-yearly intervals, the only sad aspect being the number of 22nd Battalion men unable to be there through indifferent health and/or lack of sufficient funds. I heard of at least 4 members of Auckland Branch who had booked in for the Reunion but had to cancel almost at the last moment because of poor health.

How many were there? No official figures are yet available but a total of 350 men and women was mentioned before the Reunion and I have since heard that there were about 320 people at the Sunday luncheon, possibly just about the maximum figure after last-minute withdrawals. At a guess, that could mean about 180 ex-members of the Battalion on parade on the Sunday morning. Auckland Branch mustered about 40 men and women at the Reunion including most of the members of the Branch Committee. From outside Auckland, I saw SHARKEY IHAKA (Whangarei); PAT WAITE (Turangi); MICK SHEEHAN (Whakatane); BOB SUMMERS (Hamilton); SCOTTY McMILLAN (Rotorua); STU SOUTHALL (Katikati); SNOW LEIGHTON (Helensville); MERV. ASHMAN, DOUG FROGGATT, JACK HAWLEY & RALPH STEELE (Tauranga). Also present was what has recently become a sort of enclave of former officers of the Battalion in the Taupo area and consisting of (in alphabetical order):- COLIN ARMSTRONG, LLOYD CROSS, HADDON DONALD & PETER HOCKLEY. Peter did not stay very long as he had an engagement in Gisborne that weekend. It was also good to see two former members of our Branch Committee:- E.B. (Scotch) PATERSON (Wellington), who now gets around a lot more than he could when he and his late wife, Pat, were living on Waiheke Island, and JIM WISHNOWSKY (Nelson). Jim has had more than his share of heart attacks and other illnesses but he never ceases to amaze us by his ability to bounce back and to travel to various parts of New Zealand and Australia.

PRAISE AND BLAME

Hawkes Bay Branch and the National Reunion Committee fully deserved the praise and congratulations accorded to them by all of us who were in Hastings on February 12th & 13th. The Reunion Committee was a very small one, with a limited Branch membership to call on for support and help, yet they organised and ran a highly enjoyable and successful Reunion. The Hastings R.S.A. was an excellent venue and the catering (that means the food) was really good. National President ALF GEORGE freely acknowledged the help he had been given by members of the R.S.A. executive and staff, as well as the great help he received from National Secretary BRIAN BROOKER and the Treasurer, PHIL RETSON, as well as from past Branch President, FRANK TWIGG.

It has often been said that there has yet to be a 22nd Reunion that could not be criticised in one or more ways. These criticisms need to be voiced, not as complaints but for future guidance. All National Reunion Committees include things in the programme that appear to have become traditional or that the organisers believe to be expected by the customers (us) and therefore mandatory. And it is very easy to forget that the average age level goes up by two years for every National Reunion and

PRAISE AND BLAME (CONTINUED)

that people in their late seventies or older are not as nimble or adaptable and, probably, not as tolerant as they were a few years back. Let's have a look at one or two things that could be improved. Item 1:- On Sunday morning, we old soldiers formed up in the street, marched to the big car park next to the R.S.A. and then past the crosses and the saluting base, where Lt.Col. Haddon Donald took the salute. That part was fine; it was a short march and we enjoyed being praised for our bearing by the Parade Marshall, Capt. Sturgess. But, was it not a mistake to require close on 200 men aged mainly 70 to 80 to spend the next half-hour or so standing in their ranks in the hot sun during the memorial service and address? It would not have been all that difficult to provide seating so that we could break off and sit down during the service and form up again after it was over, as is now done for the men of W.W.2 at many Anzac Day parades and services.

Item 2 - The Saturday evening Bedlam: When over 300 people are all trying to talk at once, there is an inevitable Tower of Babel effect so, why make it much, much worse by adding all the extra decibels of sound put out through amplifiers by a dance band or by any other group of professional entertainers? There was, I'm sure, a handful of people who enjoyed the music and the dancing but most of us neither wanted nor needed to be entertained. All that we needed on Saturday evening was enough space to be able to move about and to talk to old friends whom we had not seen for at least two years or, in many cases, much longer.

Item 3 - Let not YOUR ode be odious:- One of my pet peeves, which applies to all gatherings of ex-servicemen, concerns the constant misquoting of those famous lines from "Poems of the Fallen" by LAURENCE BINYON (1869-1943). At countless gatherings of returned men throughout New Zealand, someone will stand up to recite what has come to be called "the ode". The trouble is that on about 90 out of every 100 such occasions, the reciter gets Binyon's words wrong and in the wrong order as well. In my view, these errors are highly regrettable and not all that difficult to correct by anyone who will take the trouble to memorise the words and either say them or read them out just as Binyon wrote them:-

"They SHALL grow NOT OLD, as we that are left grow old;
Age SHALL not weary them, nor the years condemn;
At the going down of the sun and in the morning,
We WILL remember them".

Cedric Randerson

ROLL OF HONOUR:

36102	L.K. (LES) ALSOP	Whakatane	1/12/93
447189	J.G. (JACK) COLLINS	Huntly	19/1/94
454342	N.L. (NORMAN) KANE	Tauranga	24/10/93
6199	P.G. (PHIL) MONK	Christchurch	17/10/93
36038	A.B. (ALAN) MUTTON	Wellington	16/11/93
16259	(CANON) D.D. THORPE	Stoke, Nelson	7/10/93
40509	J. (JOCK) WELLS	Wellington	7/1/94
30734	S.W. (JIM) WHIBLEY	Te Puke	7/10/93

Members of the Auckland Branch Committee extend their deep sympathy to the widows and families of all the 22nd men who have passed away in recent months. The above list includes the

ROLL OF HONOUR (CONTINUED)

names of four men who were more widely known in the Battalion than most of us. PHIL MONK was the Battalion's first Adjutant in 1940. ALAN MUTTON, better known as "MOTO", will be remembered by many of those who served in A Company both in North Africa and Italy - a delightful fellow with an infectious laugh and an impish sense of humour. Canon DAVID D. THORPE, also known as "DDT", was the Battalion's second Padre (in the desert period of 1941/42). When he died last October, he was only 6 weeks short of his 88th birthday. JOCK WELLS died in Wellington Hospital after a long illness and many ups and downs. His ashes were taken for burial to Dargaville, where he was born just over 83 years previously. It's appropriate that our last issue contained the article by SCOTTY McMILLAN about a confrontation in Trieste in which Major Jock Wells, O.C. A Company, played a central part.

DARING TO ESCAPE

Our Battalion History records that a total of 511 officers and men of 22nd N.Z. Battalion were taken prisoner during World War 2, by far the largest numbers of them in the Greece/Crete campaign of 1941 and the Western Desert fighting (Ruweisat Ridge!) of 1942. Quite a few of them succeeded in escaping after being captured (several times in some cases) but a somewhat smaller number got all the way back to freedom; the Germans were fairly efficient when it came to re-capturing escaped P.O.W.s. Those of us who were fortunate enough never to be taken prisoner have often wondered how we would have made out had we been captured and my personal feeling has always been that I would not have put any money on my chances of being a successful escaper, that I would have lacked the necessary daring or sheer guts required to make a successful attempt.

The Army was not very good at telling us how to react to being taken prisoner. Apart from the oft-repeated instruction not to divulge any information except Name, Rank & Number, there was no training at all in what to do and what not to do if captured. Though it wasn't laid down in any training manual that I saw, there was a fairly clear understanding that it was the duty of a P.O.W. to do his best to escape and there was also the strong motive of wanting to get back to one's own unit if at all possible.

Success in escaping would have depended on many things, such as in what country you were in a P.O.W. camp and how escape-proof the camp was but an important factor must have been the ages of the escapers; men under the age of 25 are much more inclined to take risks than those slightly older. For example, ROY FARRAN, was only 19 when he was captured in Galatas, Crete in 1941 and "SANDY" THOMAS, who was taken prisoner at the same time, was not that much older and was still under the age of 22. ROBIN SINCLAIR of 22 Battalion (March, 1993 Newsletter) was a little over 23 years of age when he was captured. BUT, the theory that older men are less inclined to take risks is largely negated by the "impossible" escape of Capt. RUSSELL YOUNG from EL DABA in 1942. "Brigham" Young had already passed his 40th birthday at the time of the Battalion's disaster on RUWEISAT Ridge, yet he spent several days and nights in making a solo trek back to our lines through the desert heat. "My main thought", he said afterwards, "was to get back to my battalion at any cost".

So, let's see what two other successful escapers had to say about the motivation for escaping:- ROY FARRAN in "Winged Dagger":- "The morale in the hospital (KOKINIA near Athens) was not good. Many of the prisoners were bitter about the misdirection of the war, which had led them into Greece and Crete; many were glad to be safe from the air raids and many were just completely demoralised by our crushing defeat. The senior officers were the worst and I think it is true to say

DARING TO ESCAPE (CONTINUED)

than one is inclined to risk less as one grows older". Farran's chief gripe about the "senior officers" was that they vetoed a plan for a mass break-out because they were afraid of reprisals and the consequent loss of life.

SANDY THOMAS (in "Dare to be Free"):- "The general attitude among the prisoners towards escape was apathetic. There had been practically no training for the emergency of capture and the majority of prisoners gave way to the strange, selfish lassitude which was a feature of all prison camps! When, after his first escape attempt (August, 1941), he was asked angrily by a German interrogating officer why he had caused so much trouble and why he wanted to escape, Thomas replied:- "I have only done my duty as an officer. I am in honour bound to do my utmost to escape, as you well know. Surely, in attempting to rejoin my own forces, I am only doing what you would expect of a member of the German Officer Corps in similar circumstances". The effect of this ingenious statement on his interrogator was quite remarkable. The German came towards him all smiles, grasped his hand and said:- "Of course, of course, Mr. Thomas. We officers have our honour and our duty. We have our code. You are quite, quite, right".

Elsewhere in his book, Sandy Thomas had quite a bit to say about the help he was given by Greek families that insisted on giving him shelter for a few days even though they knew that, if they were caught aiding escapers, the ruthless Germans would shoot the whole family out of hand - no difference for age or sex. "they were intensely patriotic; their country had been invaded, they hated the German invaders and were prepared to take enormous risks to aid escaping prisoners". Without that help, Thomas would scarcely have made it out of Greece.

Cedric Randerson

THE CHURCH PARADE AT HASTINGS: 1000 HOURS 13 FEBRUARY 1994

"Age shall not weary them" - perhaps so, but it surely has quietened them.

First impression of the Church Parade was one of quiet respectability as they gathered along the roadway. Gone was the noisy, often boisterous gathering of those early reunions. Here, they stood about in twos and threes, quietly talking.

The "fall-in" was so subdued that the Regular-Army Parade Marshall had no difficulty in making himself heard.

Then came the order to march and once again they were not aged men but Soldiers. Backs straightened up: heads held erect. Step changes as they picked up and then adjusted to the beat of the Band: forming threes as they marched: "dressing" for line.

The march was short - 200 or 300 yards perhaps; yet for most quite long enough. Long enough for they who could once have covered 20 miles with greater ease than those few yards.

Came the White Crosses of the Battalion's war-dead, and beyond, on the saluting base, The Colonel. As the orders rang out, all on that parade were indeed soldiers again. Heads snapped sideways to face our dead and our Colonel. - And the service: on my left the throat of one who holds the M.C. contracting as emotion was suppressed. Alongside, a one-time tough Sergeant-Major - a tear slowly trickling from each eye and yet too proud to draw attention by wiping them away. To the right another who quite unashamedly reached for a handkerchief on several occasions. For myself, I found

THE CHURCH PARADE AT HASTINGS (CONTINUED)

it necessary to "sniffle" back a trickle in the nose. A suddenly developed cold perhaps!

And all the while the ladies: lining the edge of the parade as they always have done - from those first days when they lined wharves and railway stations on days of departure. And not a few tears here too, today. The Battalion widow who had travelled across the North Island to be here. A little red-eyed after the service but quiet, content, and at peace.

Just what was it that was abroad at Hastings on Sunday the 13th February at 1000 hours? Memories? Regrets? Age? Perhaps! Perhaps! But was it not the Spirit? The Spirit of the 22nd N.Z. Infantry Battalion.

Doug Froggatt

THE BATTLE OF HASTINGS

As Doug. has so well recaptured it, Sunday morning at the Hastings National Reunion was a time for quietness and introspection but there was a little more tension in the air at 11 a.m. on the Saturday morning when the delegates from each Branch gathered in a side room of the Hastings R.S.A. for the Biennial meeting of the National Association. Anyone who had studied the lengthy Agenda and the pre-circulated Remits and Submissions from Branches could have been excused for wondering if we were about to have a reincarnation of "1066 and all that", especially as two of the Remits were in direct opposition to each other. In the event, we got through the agenda fairly quietly in the main. The opposing Remits had to do with the L.W. Andrew V.C. Bursary:- Manawatu Branch proposed that the Bursary be terminated and that the Branch subscriptions (which have financed the Bursary for about 20 years) be banked into the National Fund for assistance to 22nd Battalion members in Homes throughout New Zealand. The Remit also suggested the setting up of a Committee to administer this fund. It was seconded by Wellington Branch but any other support appeared to be lacking and the Remit was defeated when put to a vote. The opposing Remit (which was passed) was put forward by Hawkes Bay Branch and proposed (in the slightly amended form agreed to by the meeting) that a Trust Fund be set up to ensure that the L.W. Andrew V.C. Bursary is perpetuated and that an opportunity be given to individual members to contribute to this fund if they wish. You will, I'm sure, be hearing more about the proposed Trust Fund in due course.

The other principal item on the Agenda was the venue for the 1996 National Reunion. An immediate bid to host this Reunion by Wellington Branch forestalled two other possible bids. The new National President, MICK KENNY, announced that the venue would be at the C.I.T., Trentham, where the 1990 National Reunion was held.

Cedric Randerson

"ESCAPE! ESCAPE! ESCAPE!" She Cried.

(This is the first part of an article written by T.W. (PAT) KENNEDY of Palmerston North about his experiences after escaping from a P.O.W. camp in northern Italy in 1943. The article first appeared in "P.O.W. WOW" magazine and is taken from that source with Pat's permission. Ed.)

When Italy capitulated to the Allies in September, 1943, I was in a prisoner of war farm working ~~camp near a village called Gruppiano in the district of Vercelli in Northern Italy. There were many~~ such camps throughout the district and in ours there were some 106 persons comprising ten Australians with the balance New Zealand soldiers, including eight corporals.

ESCAPE! ESCAPE! ESCAPE! (CONTINUED)

The camp accommodation was a long double storey stone hut with barbed wire surrounding that portion used by us. The building was divided into three, the Lieutenant in charge using the top storey and the guards the bottom room.

The other two top rooms were used for storage of food and Red Cross parcels when they were available. My friends sleeping in the top bunks alongside me and in the same working party of 30 persons were Noel Burberry of Hataitai, Wellington and Bob Howell, Remuera. We decided that we would keep together as long as possible.

We were overjoyed to hear the news that Italy had surrendered to the Allies. An Italian colonel came from Biella to inform us of the news and gave instructions that we were to remain in camp until a British officer came to arrange our repatriation. Two weeks passed and still no British officer arrived. Meanwhile the Italian officer in charge of the camp and the guards had vanished back to their respective homes. Most of the prisoners, including myself, wandered out of the camp and roamed the countryside during the day and returned to the camp at night to sleep. Unknown to us it was during this time that the German troops in Italy were reorganising and taking over all the prisoner of war camps throughout Italy and collecting all escaped prisoners and transporting them to camps in Germany.

Early one morning when the three of us had left the camp and were wandering about we heard a small truck a distance away making for our camp. With another person, Tom Hudson of Wellington, I made back to the camp to investigate, leaving my two friends and the other party of five waiting for us to return with news. Tom and I wandered back on the main road to the camp and it was not until we took the bend that led into the camp that we saw the German corporal sentry with a tommy gun.

Before we could run he shouted to us to come back to the camp. It was no use arguing with an armed soldier. I was deeply frustrated and depressed. This was the third occasion that I had been taken prisoner of war. The first time it was at Sidi Aziz, where I was a POW for five weeks and was released by the South African Division. The next occasion was at Ruesewit Ridge near El Alamein, and now this after only three weeks' freedom.

Back in camp there was a German officer, two German and four Italian sentries, with about forty prisoners. After a while the officer and the driver of the truck returned to Biella to fetch more transport to take us away. Near midday I went to get a cup of water from the pump which was at the far end of the camp. After drinking I decided that I would make a break for it from the wire at the side of the building hidden from the German corporal with the machine gun. The other sentries had rifles. I waited my opportunity when the two other Germans had walked along the road to the corporal, most likely making enquiries about lunch, and left the four Italian sentries in the compound.

I rushed to the side of the hut where the wire was slack and crawled through, when I made for the paddy field alongside because I had been spotted by the two German sentries returning along the road. Luckily for me there was a four foot ditch nearby into which I landed. There was water waist deep which hindered my progress. Crawling and swimming I made the other end of the ditch about 200 yards away. Meanwhile I could hear the shouts and the machine gun fire over my head, also intermittent rifle fire. I do not know whether I was more afraid of the water snakes in the ditch or the bullets hitting the bank. The sentries no doubt considered it wiser to let one prisoner escape and guard the remainder in the camp. (Incidentally, I met Tom Hudson on returning to New Zealand, and he informed me that they were transported to Biella at about 2 p.m. and from there in cattle trucks through to Austria and Germany).

The officer on returning to the camp with a troop carrier transport was very philosophical over the escape. What did it matter having one more or less in the count? I would be picked up sooner or later. He was wrong! I remained free for 18 months to the end of hostilities in Europe.

When I came out at the other end of the ditch I made through the rice fields until I was a safe

ESCAPE! ESCAPE! ESCAPE! (CONTINUED)

distance from the camp then I sat on a bank beneath a solitary tree and undressed, wringing out my socks and clothes as best I could. Towards evening while I was still resting and waiting for my outer clothes to dry, I was pleased to be reunited with Noel and Bob and the other five again. When Tom and I had not returned to them they decided to scout around the camp and see what was doing. A hundred yards or more away from the camp they could see the Italian sentries grouped together chatting, but none of us.

Suddenly they heard the shouts from the guards, the machine gun and rifle fire, and they made for cover. In the two hours I had been by myself under the tree I learned what it was to be alone and lonely. Our meeting again was a real pick me up to all of us, especially to me of course. That night we slept in a deserted hut about two miles from camp. At about midnight, under a full moon, the three of us decided to continue our journey and make tracks to the mountains with the idea of arriving in Switzerland. We decided that we would by-pass the main roads and travel through the paddy fields and vineyards. (To be continued)

TREASURER'S CORNER

At the start of yet another financial year, it is good to be able to report that our Branch Income & Expenditure Account for the year ended 28/2/94 looks certain to finish up with a modest surplus (again) and that this, together with our reasonably healthy reserves, ensures that these Newsletters can be continued for the next 12 months and, we hope, for quite a bit longer. You know that we stopped sending out sub. accounts quite some years ago and that we rely on those whose names are on our mailing list to send in their subscriptions (supplemented where possible by donations) on a regular basis. Your response continues to be excellent and your Committee is most grateful. Officially, our sub. rate has stayed at \$5 for the past 7 years but this is not nearly enough to cover our Newsletter costs in full. The shortfall has been made up by many donations, ranging from \$5 up.

March, 1994

22nd Battalion Association
PO Box 26-314
AUCKLAND 3

Branch Social - 10th April, 1994

I enclose the sum of \$ _____, BEING:

(1) Entrance fee for _____ people at \$12 per head - \$

AND/OR:

(2) My 1994/95 subscription (& Donation) - \$

TOTAL \$

NAME (Block letters): _____

ADDRESS:- _____

(Please return by 5th April)