

"Vrai et Fort"

22nd Battalion Association

AUCKLAND BRANCH

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BRANCH NEWSLETTER

P.O. Box 26-314

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LA ROMOLA

A year or more ago, the Editor of these Newsletters received in the mail an article with the title of:- "A Day In the Life of A Tank Troop." The sender was C.J. (BRICK) LORIMER, who is the Secretary of Auckland Branch, 19th Battalion & Armoured Regiment Association and the article told a lively and frequently amusing tale of the fortunes or otherwise of No. 10 Troop, "C" Squadron, 19th Armoured Regiment on July 27th, 1944 during 2 N.Z. Div's advance on Florence. After reading through the article, the Editor had no hesitation at all in deciding that it would be of considerable interest to foot-sloggers as well as to tankmen, gunners and every other kind of ex-soldier. Infantrymen worked closely with armoured units throughout World War 2 and many former members of 22 Battalion have rather bitter memories of those occasions in North Africa when the tank support promised for first light failed to appear. We were delighted when we heard that 4th N.Z. Infantry Brigade had become 4th N.Z. Armoured Brigade, being fully aware that the disasters at places like Ruweisat Ridge were caused by the tanks not being under Infantry command, a problem that we were sure would disappear when 2 N.Z. Div. had its own Armoured Brigade. Then, after Alamein, the 22nd returned to Base to become 4th Brigade's Motor Battalion, receiving specialised training for this role. It was not till after the Division moved across the sea to Italy that it became apparent that a Motor Battalion was much better suited to the war in the desert than to the battles that took place in the built-up and mountainous areas of Italy.

Any way, the Tank Troop article duly appeared in our Newsletter of October 1993 and Brick Lorimer lost little time in writing to thank us on behalf of the 19th Association's Branch Committee, in these words:- "We do appreciate being included in the mailing list for your well-produced, interesting and informative Branch Newsletter. How you manage to maintain the number and quality of issues is a source of amazement to our Branch Committee". Brick sounded a little apologetic about the quality of the Tank Troop article but he had no need to feel that way. It was, in my humble opinion, very well written and gave some fascinating glimpses of an action, in which 22nd Battalion was very much involved, from the perspective of members of a tank crew.

Brick's letter went on to say:- "No doubt surviving members of "A" Company, 22nd Battalion will recall their contribution during those hectic 3 or 4 days of action in the vicinity of the Pesa River, Cerbaia and San Michele. I well remember the action at the village of La Romola, where men of 22nd Battalion acquitted themselves with distinction. After having gained the village, they were called upon to repel a series of determined counter-attacks by German infantry supported by tanks and artillery. Their stand without doubt relieved the pressure in and around San Michele, the scene of a pitched battle, a close quarter affair in which 24th and 25th Battalions were badly mauled and the 19th Regiment lost more men and tanks than in the entire Cassino show. It was a brutal and uncompromising engagement, the cost for the Germans being enormous. They finally abandoned San Michele, leaving behind numerous wounded; there were also countless dead in front of our positions. The futility of it all still rankles".

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ROLL OF HONOUR

33651	T.C. HORTON	Rotorua	10/5/94
6406	K.T. (Keith) LINDSAY	Wellington	18/3/94
6770	P.W.E. McKEE	Wellington	24/7/94
44820	C.C. (Ces) NEWBY	Perth	13/8/94
28209	M.J. (Mel) PRISK	Auckland	29/7/94
44040	L.J. (Puk) PUKLOWSKI	Auckland	29/1/94
41110	J.B.O. (Jim) WISHNOWSKY	Nelson	26/10/94
430804	A.W.R. (Bert) CLIFFORD	Pukekohe	5/11/94

The Auckland Branch Committee extends its deep sympathies to the widows and families of all former members of the 22nd who have passed away in recent months. The above list includes several men who played an active part in the affairs of Auckland Branch. JIM WISHNOWSKY was a member of our Branch Committee for about 15 years before he and his wife Loma moved from Auckland to the Nelson area. Loma predeceased her husband by several years but Jim kept right on going and continued to attend National Reunions despite his many ailments and illnesses. He was at the Hastings one last February and looked full of life. MEL PRISK was another regular attender at Branch and National Reunions and so was CES NEWBY, until he and Doris emigrated to Australia 5½ years ago. Doris Newby tells us that Ces. suffered from ill-health for the whole of the 5½ years since they went to Perth.

JOTTINGS

NOT SO WELL LIST: Most members of our Battalion Association would admit to feeling not as well in 1994 as they did in 1993. We all have ailments that tend to get worse as time marches on and you don't really know how well or unwell other people are unless you question them or speak to their close relatives. But quite a few of our people have been a good deal less than well this year:- MASSEY WOOD (Auckland) had a severe stroke a few months back and is still in hospital. Three others who have been in hospital but are back home again are:- E.G. (Snow) LEIGHTON (South Kaipara Head); LAURIE BALDERSTON (Kaiwaka) and JIM SHERRATT (Katikati). Down in Wellington, National President MICK KENNY has been in hospital twice this year (Mick's wife Grace has also been on the sick list) and PETER CUTCHE, who became National Secretary in February, has already had to give up the job because of ill-health. NORMAN CARTER has taken over this responsibility meantime. Two other Auckland Branch members, RON JONES and JACK GROVES, have been in hospital recently but are reported to be back home again. I'm sure that there are others who have been on the sick list that I haven't heard about.

RETURN TO CASSINO

As you know, a number of parties of ex-members of 2nd N.Z. Division travelled back to Italy last May to take part in the commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the Battle of Cassino. There was the official party, sponsored by the N.Z.R.S.A., and a number of independent groups organised by Travel Agencies. "BRICK" LORIMER of the 19th Battn. & Regt. Assn. sent me a copy of a 19th Assn. Newsletter containing his full report of the trip and I am taking the liberty of swiping a few excerpts. His group visited Sorrento and the Isle of Capri before proceeding to Cassino and the Monastery. "We looked eagerly but with mixed feelings for a glimpse of that unforgettable landmark. Suddenly, as we emerged into the Liri Valley, there it stood - The Monastery of Monte Cassino, high above Cassino town, clearly visible in the morning sun, no

Return to Cassino (continued)

longer a menacing heap of ruins that dominated our very existence so many years ago. Rebuilt on its previous site, following substantially the lines of its predecessor, a massive structure commanding the attention of all who pass through Cassino or the Liri Valley. (Editor's note:- As everyone knows, The Monastery's history goes back through 14 centuries, during which it was destroyed and rebuilt a number of times before its most recent demolition, by allied bombers, in February/March 1944).

In Cassino (the town itself), the group had difficulty in recognising and identifying areas familiar to them in 1944. "Parts of the crypt were discernible alongside a reconstructed convent. Castle Hill with its weathered, battered and crumbling ruins was a stark and silent reminder for those involved there. The railway station drew other members of the party. Our endeavours to identify the area of the Hummocks and Round House were without success but we did have the site (now non-existent) of the Cable Car ground station pointed out and Hangmans Hill, a spot that did not really need any reintroduction. The Ampitheatre could not readily be located, nor could the exact sites of the Hotel de Roses or Continental Hotel. A member of the group quietly observed "I can still smell it" as we recalled the horrible stench that once pervaded the whole town area". The report goes on to describe the Commemoration Service on May 15 at the Commonwealth Services Cemetery near the town and the separate service for the Kiwi contingent on May 16 in the New Zealand section of the Cemetery. At this service, DOUG. FROGGATT pronounced Laurence Binyon's immortal lines:- "They shall grow not old - - -". On the same day, the New Zealanders present and a few others gathered at the Cassino Railway for the unveiling of a Memorial Plaque reading:- "In memory of those New Zealanders who gave their lives and in honour of all who served at Cassino in 1944".

To conclude, we reprint this extract from the book "MONTE CASSINO", written in 1984 by David Hapgood and David Richardson:-

The new Monte Cassino is once more a site of pilgrimage, as it always was. Since the war Cassino town has also become a site to which pilgrims come. The veterans come from all over the world, as they did 40 years ago, to relive the days of their youth when they fought each other here. The relatives come too. They all come, as the taxi drivers know, to visit the cemeteries where comrades and husbands and brothers and fathers lie. The Poles alone are up on the hill, behind the monastery, on the near slope of Hill 593, now once more known as Monte Calvario. Their cemetery is poorly kept, because, it is said - it is still another Polish tragedy - the present government of Poland does not care to be reminded that the Poles who died here wanted to free their homeland from Stalin as well as Hitler. The British cemetery on the outskirts of town is home also to the New Zealanders, the Indians, and the Gurkhas. The Germans are on the other side of Cassino, on the road up the Rapido Valley. The French and the Italians are down Route 6, and the Americans are 70 miles away at Anzio. All these cemeteries, with a single exception, bear inscriptions in which leaders involve god or nation or both to justify or even glorify the deaths of the young men who lie there. The exception is the German cemetery, and it is here that a visit to the war in Cassino should end. Because of the horrors their government unleashed on the world, the Germans are denied the usual patriotic memorials. What the visitor finds instead is not easily forgotten. To reach the graves of 20,000 Germans the visitor must pass through a loggia, a small square stone building upon to the sky. There is no decor or inscription of any kind here. This day the silence is unmarred. It takes your eyes a moment to adjust to the half-light, and then you see that you are not alone. Across the room, otherwise bare, you see the seated figures of a man and a woman sculpted in metal. The woman is bent forward, shattered with grief. The man, erect and sombre, has put his hand on her shoulder. These are the parents, and their presence here is the one enduring truth that can be told about what happened in this place.

DARING TO ESCAPE (continued)

Since "The Robert Sinclair Story" appeared in our March 1993 issue, the Editor has been receiving quantities of press cuttings and other usable material about other 22nd men who escaped from POW camps and such like places. This is excellent; escape stories involving members of 22 Battalion have had very little publicity among those to whom the details are of great interest and references to them in the Battalion History are almost entirely confined to brief footnotes. The first material to come in was a copy of a 1961 edition of POW - WOW Magazine which contained an Escape story written by PAT KENNEDY of Palmerston North. We published an instalment of it in our last issue and will continue the story in this one. After that, I was in touch with COLIN ARMSTRONG, formerly of Wanganui but now of Taupo, whose POW experiences and escapes were described in his book "Life Without Ladies", published in 1947 and reviewed by (among others) TERRY McLEAN (in the "Weekly News" of July 16, 1947). There will not be enough space for Colin's story in this issue but it's at the top of the list for the next one (due about next March).

The inflow of material was topped off in August last when the NZ Herald published a report (accompanied by a photograph) about JOHN SENIOR of Torbay, who was just leaving on a trip to Italy to meet again and thank members of the five Italian families who for 18 months sheltered him and three other Kiwis from the Germans. One of the men with him in Italy at that time was also from the 22nd - the late TOBY PEARCE. John Senior told the Herald reporter how he had been captured in the desert in July 1942; he became separated from his companions, hid among some rocks, then dozed off and woke up to see a senior German officer on a tank at the head of a convoy only metres away. It was this officer who said to him: "For you the war is over" and John swears that it was ERWIN ROMMEL himself. It may well have been. John and others were taken to a P.O.W. camp in Milan and then to a work camp, No. 107-4 near Venice. Escape from there (September 1943) was easy and, from then until April 1945, John and the three other Kiwi soldiers were sheltered by the five families at a place called San Giorgio di Livenza. "We never slept in the houses - it was too risky. We stayed in cane huts between the grapevines".

Eventually, John and his friends, as well as other groups of escapers, got away from Italy and back to Egypt in secret night operations conducted by the Royal Navy. The groups were taken off the beach near Venice by small rubber boats in the dead of night, transferred to torpedo boats about 600 m out then landed at Ancona and taken from there to Egypt. Under the official Secrets Act, John Senior and the other escapers were pledged to secrecy about the method of their escape and it was not until this year that he felt able to tell the Italian families how he had escaped.

DAVID RUSSELL, G.C. - L/Cpl. David Russell was one 22nd man who did **NOT** succeed in escaping from Italy. He did escape from P.O.W. Camp and then spent a good deal of time visiting and assisting other escaped prisoners. Recaptured by the enemy, he was executed three days later by a German firing squad for refusing point blank to name the Italians who had worked with him. He has justly been described as a hero who ranks with New Zealand's Victoria Cross winners. He was originally buried (February 1945) in the village Cemetery at PONTE DI PIAVE but, in 1947, the Commonwealth War Graves Commission had his remains transferred to the British War Cemetery at UDINE. While STU SOUTHALL of Katikati was in Italy last May for the Cassino 50th anniversary ceremonies, his Tour party had as local guide and interpreter one VERNON LEWIS, a member of 2 NZ.E.F. (not 22nd) who married an Italian girl after the war and has since lived in Rome. Finding that he had two ex-members of 22 Battalion in his party (the other was ARTHUR ALRIDGE of Waipukurau), Vern. Lewis told them that he was very keen to have some sort of memorial to David Russell erected at Ponte di Piave, where Russell was

Daring to Escape (continued)

executed and originally buried, a project that would greatly please the people of that village. Lewis has since written to Stu and Arthur, as well as to people like Hon. Warren Cooper, N.Z. Minister of Defence, the N.Z. R.S.A. and our National President, Mick Kenny. The idea is being followed up and may lead to something being done in time for the 50th anniversary of Russell's death - on 25/2/95.

THE BATTLE OF HASTINGS - PART 2

In the edition of this Newsletter that we sent out last March, I made a report on the decisions made by the Biennial Meeting of Branch delegates during the National Reunion held in Hastings in February. If you read that report, you will recall that we, the delegates, had to consider (among other items on the Agenda) two Remits from Branches that were in direct opposition to each other. These opposing Remits were about the L.W. Andrew V.C. Bursary, which has been awarded to a student at Horowhenua College in every second year since 1974. It has always been a national project, financed by contributions from all the active Branches of our Association. One of the Remits proposed that the Bursary be terminated, while the other Remit was aimed at perpetuating the Bursary by setting up a Trust Fund for its future financing, with all members of the Association given an opportunity to contribute to this Fund. Having studied the pre-circulated Remits and Submissions from the Branches and having discussed them with other members of the Auckland Branch Committee, George Matthews and I went to Hastings expecting a ding-dong debate over the two Bursary Remits but, on the day, the Termination Remit did not seem to have very much support and was lost when put to a vote, whereas the Trust Fund Remit was approved after a brief discussion and a minor amendment to its wording.

These decisions should have ended the Bursary debate but, sadly, they did not. The delegates from two of the Association's branches went home firmly believing that their Branch AGMs were entitled to decide whether or not to accept the decisions of a national meeting of Branch delegates. This was a total misapprehension on the part of the delegates concerned; the decisions made by a meeting of delegates are binding on all Branches, this on the basis of the long-established principle of majority rule. While our branches have a good deal of autonomy at the local level, the Battalion Association would quickly cease to exist if its governing body (the meeting of delegates) did not have power to make decisions that are binding on the Association and on its branches. What happened next was that the 1994 AGMs of the two dissenting Branches declined to make payment of their contributions to the 1994 Bursary award and, in July, one of these branches held a special meeting of its members at which it was decided that the Branch be dissolved. This decision was later rescinded and it is good to be able to report that, at a special meeting of Branch delegates held at the Levin RSA on 12th September, the decisions made in Hastings were re-affirmed and our Association's normal state of harmony restored. An outsider looking in on the unseemly bickering that went on within the Association for 3 or 4 months could have been excused for wondering if these ageing senior citizens were in an advanced stage of senility!

Some beneficial results have emerged from the acrimonious Bursary debate. The Remit proposing that the Bursary be dropped was accompanied by criticisms such as that recent awards had gone to the wrong people and that there had been no recent feedback to indicate that the Bursary winners valued the awards. This last criticism has been strongly denied as having any validity but, for this year's award, the requirements for the Bursary were defined more precisely and the winner received an explanatory Certificate (bearing the Battalion crest) as well as a cheque. Also, a Bursary Honours Board is to be installed at the College, listing the names of all winners. To establish the Bursary Trust Fund decided upon at Hastings, a Committee of 3 was

Battle of Hastings - Part 2 (continued)

appointed at the Levin meeting. They are:- NORMAN CARTER (Wellington); DOUG FROGGATT (Tauranga); NOEL WHITEHOUSE (Levin). A Circular seeking Trust Fund contributions is to be sent to all Association members with the first 1996 National Reunion Newsletter.

The Bursary has been described several times at biennial meetings as the best thing our Association has ever done and the fact that it has been continued over a 20 year period clearly indicates the support it has had. I can only speak for myself but I know that I also speak for many others when I say that our war service overseas widened our horizons and heightened our awareness of the freedoms we New Zealanders take for granted freedoms that simply do not exist in many countries. We are very conscious, too, that there has been no world-wide conflict since 1939/45 and that we have reason to hope that our grandchildren and succeeding generations will be able to live their lives in peace. Our Association's continuing Bursary project gives each of us an opportunity to make a small contribution to a living memorial to 22nd Battalion and everyone who served in it.

As a footnote, did you know that an early recipient of the Bursary is now a teacher at Horowhenua College. She is SHEONA HOGG, who also happens to be the daughter of an ex-member of 22nd Battalion.

Cedric Randerson

"ESCAPE! ESCAPE! ESCAPE!" She Cried

(We continue Pat Kennedy's story of his escape from an Italian P.O.W. camp in September 1943 and his success in avoiding recapture during the rest of the war in Italy. The first instalment (in our March 1994 issue) ended with Pat being reunited with his friends NOEL & BOB and their plans to get to Switzerland. Ed.)

Because he knew a little French, and could travel at night by compass, Noel was chosen as leader. After an hour travelling with the moon and stars we decided to rest a while. On continuing for about another hour, Bob suddenly realised that he had left his blanket at the previous resting place. This blanket was sent to him in a clothing parcel by his mother in Auckland and he wanted to take it home to New Zealand. Travelling for another two hours, I was suddenly surprised to pick up Bob's blanket again from where he had left it. With us following the North Star we had walked around in a circle!

Now it was my turn to be leader and seeing that it was nearly dawn I decided to make for a light I could see in the distance and rest. We had to cross a broad road before arriving at the stone cottage which had the light shining, and although there was a motor bike and also some heavy traffic passing occasionally along the road, we eventually crossed without anything happening. When we finally arrived at the house it was Noel's turn to try out his French language with the family. I must mention that Noel was married when he entered camp in Trentham and now he had many photos of his wife and of a baby daughter he had never seen. These photos always worked the oracle with the womenfolk in our travels. They were the means of getting us food more so than his mastery of the French language.

In fact I could get more results with hand signals than poor Noel could with his French. The owner, his wife and daughter came out in their night attire at our shouting and the barking of his dog that was leaping out of his chain. The owner told us that we could rest up in the loft until seven o'clock that morning, when we must leave his farm because it was very dangerous for us to remain there. The house was only a short distance from the main Milano-Torino road. This was the broad road we had crossed previously. In fact from the loft we could see the traffic distinctly.

"Escape! Escape! Escape! (continued)"

It seemed that we had slept only ten minutes when the owner climbed up the ladder to the loft with another young lad.

WE HEAD FOR SWITZERLAND

He gave us each a four ounce loaf of bread and a piece of cheese and told us that the young lad would guide us to the mountains. With this guide we travelled all through the day and slept in hay lofts at night. On the fourth day we reached the outskirts of the town of Biella and were handed over to an alpine climber, a lad of about eighteen years who volunteered to guide us to Switzerland. Oh! What would we give to be fit again? This lad literally ran up the hills and continued to urge us on with the encouragement that Mt. Camino, 7,000 ft, was just around the next bend. This continued for four days by which time we were absolutely exhausted.

When we finally arrived at the Chateau via mountain escalator, we were surprised to find approximately thirty other Australian and New Zealand escaped prisoners and the same number of Italian soldiers or guards. That same day we received our first scare that the German troops were at the hotel at the foot of the escalator. To stop the Germans using the escalator someone had conveniently blown up the motor. We heard machine gun fire a distance away and there was a scatter. There were only three Italians armed with useless rifles among the lot of us. A few days later the escaped prisoners were sorted into three groups in the order we had arrived at the Chateau and with two guides the first party left for Switzerland. We subsequently heard that this party of ten did arrive in Switzerland. The next party were left stranded at Domodossalla and our party were left at the Chateau for the Germans to collect.

It was then that I parted from my friends Noel Burberry of Carterton and Bob Howell of Auckland. Our 18 year old guide who was still with us took them down to the village of Piedecavallo and returned for me and Les Bear, a school teacher from Waikato.

We heard later than the rest of the party who remained at the Chateau were collected by the Germans. Our guide handed Les and me over to an alpine guide who informed us that it was impossible to get to Switzerland due to the snow and also the German troops who had all the mountain passes guarded. Our young guide bade us farewell but not before I had given him a letter of recommendation for his assistance to us. The alpine guide left us in a stone hut with another Australian, Snow Bartram, who had a nasty boil on his neck, with the instructions that he would be back the following day with some bread and food.

"THE TEDESCHI ARE ON RASTRALEMENTO".

Two days went past and no sign of the guide. It was at this time that Germans were offering a reward for any information that would lead to the recapture of escaped POW's. We summed up the position and left. Many escaped prisoners were recaptured by this method. The next village of call was Pollone where we stayed for ten days. It was not long before the people in the village knew we were in the hills and they brought us food. One girl who brought us food saw the nasty boil on Snow's neck and took him to her home to look after him. Early one morning the same girl with a basket on her head, pretending that she was gathering some chestnuts, came running into our hut screaming, "Escape, Escape, Escape, the Tedeschi re on Rastramento!".

They were just round the next bend. This was the first time I had heard the word "Rastramento". She told us to fly up the mountain (an impossibility) and that Snow was safe in their attic. We were sitting ducks if we had followed her advice and scrambled up the mountain side, because the Germans, we found out later, had three to four columns travelling at various levels. Thinking quickly and acting faster I made for some bushes near the stream about forty

"Escape! Escape! Escape! (continued)"

yards from the house with Les following me. It was now mid-November and the start of the real winter.

The bushes did not give much cover so we continued on round until we were sheltered behind a waterfall not before time, because the same distance below we saw the columns of Germans (20) cross the creek on the stones placed in the stream. Their attention was held by stepping on the stones and they did not notice us above. We kept as still as mice until all had passed and remained in that position until dark when the girl came to see if all was right. She told us that the countryside was full of spies and we must leave that part of the mountains. She would shelter Snow. We were taken down the valley to the village of Pralunga and at night marched up the next mountain and handed to a group of Italian partisans.

In this party were three other Kiwis, Pop Walker and Bob Hodgson from Taranaki and Keith Chote, a carrier from Hamilton, also an Australian, Arthur, who was a Presbyterian minister taken prisoner of war at Tobruk. The party had four Italian rifles and one machine gun but not much ammunition. We did all the carting of food, etc, for this party and it was not long before we argued with the Italians and the outcome was that six British were taken over two more ranges and left with four Serbian officers who had also escaped from the German troops. They were all armed with revolvers.

To be continued

SORRY I SAID THAT

At breakfast, this doctor and his wife were having a bitter row and as he slammed out of the house he shouted "You are not so good in bed either". Later he cooled down and decided to ring home and make peace. After many rings she answered. "What took you so long to answer the phone" he asked. "I was in bed" she replied. "What were you doing in bed at this time of the day" he asked. "I was getting a second opinion" was the reply.

TREASURER'S CORNER

For the information of ex-members of 22 Battalion who have only recently moved into our Branch district, it is necessary to explain why we ask for money each time we send out one of these Newsletters. To keep costs down and because some of our members are more affluent than others, we stopped sending out sub accounts several years ago. We have also kept our official annual sub down to \$5, even though it needs to be at least twice that much. This highly inefficient way of obtaining subs and/or donations from our Branch members and other recipients of these Newsletters works surprisingly well and we are most grateful to everyone concerned for thier continued and generous support, which makes it possible for us to go on producing, printing and mailing these Newsletters. The response to our March issue was excellent, as always but we still need to hear from quite a few people this year. If you know that a payment is due from you, please use the reply slip below.

Cedric Randerson

22nd Battalion Association
Box 26- 314
AUCKLAND 3

November, 1994

I enclose the sum of \$ _____, being my current sub. (\$5) and/or Donation.

Name & Address (Block Letters):-

Army No: