

"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, 1995

BRANCH SOCIAL FUNCTION - SUNDAY, 9TH APRIL 1995

Yes, it's that time again when we hold what is, these days, our one and only **official** Branch get-together in the year. Some of us did assemble for an extra and unofficial "do" late in 1994 but there was no Newsletter going out at the time and the only way in which it could be publicised was by means of a ring-around to those considered to be most likely to be available. Our Annual Branch Reunions, held in late March or early April, are still proving most enjoyable and very popular. The numbers fell away slightly in 1992 but were back to the normal level (about 50) in both 1993 and 1994 and we can always depend on some of our Branch members from well out of Auckland being there, usually from as far afield as Bay of Plenty, Waikato and Northland.

The tradition has long been established that, although our Rules require us to hold a Branch AGM at this time of year, the meeting will be of short duration and will distract us very briefly only from the main purpose of the gathering, which is informal and social. **PLEASE** use the Reply Slip in this issue to send us **your prepayment by mail**. By doing this, you will save the Treasurer endless work at the door and give us the numbers the caterer's must have. If you can't possibly be there, **please send back the Reply Slip in any case**, enclosing your sub-payment for the 1995/96 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. (promptly)
Luncheon: To start between
Noon & 1 p.m.
Close down: 3 p.m.

VISITORS: Your friends & relatives will be most welcome.

THE COST: \$10 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 FILL IN THE REPLY SLIP NOW and send it with your remittance in time to reach the Treasurer **by Tuesday, 4/4/95.**

ROLL OF HONOUR

650434	H. COURTNEY	Whangarei	8/9/94
30093	W.J. (BILL) GREIG	Rotorua	14/2/95
128469	A.V.A. HODGE	Morrinsville	2/1/95
811899	R. HUDSON	Whakatane	9/7/94
662656	W.C. RODGERS	Auckland	27/5/94
461533	J.H.N. TREWEEK	Tauranga	5/9/94
14661	G. WEBSTER	Mt Maunganui	1/3/94

The above list contains only the names of deceased former members of the Battalion who were living in our Branch area. Most of this information is sent to us by JOHN BOWKER, who is doing an excellent job as Keeper of the Roll (Branch as well as National). Of the men listed, BILL GREIG was a financial member of our Branch for many years and sent us a sub payment as recently as last December. He was also a member of the Crete Veterans Association.

Among recent deaths of 22nd Battn men in other Branches were those of:- 30388 IAN C BURNETT of Wanganui, who died in December and 43992 HARRY TILBURY of Levin (died 16/2/95). Ian was a former President of Wanganui Branch and played a leading part in the Association's affairs for a great many years, while Harry Tilbury was a well-known member of A Company for a long period. The Auckland Branch Committee extends its deep sympathy to the widows and families of all former members of the 22nd who have passed away in recent months.

IN BRIEF

We warmly welcome to our Branch area **R H (RAY) MOLLIER**. After living in Napier for many years, Ray moved in late December to:- WOODHAUGH, RD3, KAUKAPAKAPA (near Helensville). We are hoping to see you, Ray at our Branch get-together on April 9.

Letter of thanks:- As you know, the branch entrusted with the staging and organising of the next National Reunion sends out one or more publicity circulars to everyone on the National Roll. Invariably, some of these circulars come back to the branch concerned marked "Gone. No address", "Deceased" or what have you. In some cases, a widow or other relative writes back to tell the Association that its member is deceased and to request deletion of name from mailing list; occasionally, it will be a demand rather than a request. Following the sending out of the first notice about the 1996 National Reunion in Wellington next January, National Secretary NORM CARTER received such a letter but it was refreshingly different from the usual type. It was sent by DOUG JOHNSON of Taradale, Hawkes Bay and said:- "I regret to inform you that my father (O.M. JOHNSON) passed away 20 years ago but I can assure you that had he been alive today he would have been there "with bells on". This is not a letter of complaint but one of gratitude that, after all these years, you still have a list of those that were part of and made up the battalion and that you still have reunions to remember the good (bad) old days and all your mates of that time. I hope that your Reunion is a roaring success and that you are able to continue for some years to come, even though time is thinning the ranks".

IAN MILLAR of Remuera is the Hon Secretary of Auckland Branch, **27th NZ M.G. & Inf. Battalion Association**, which is one of several Unit Associations in the Auckland area that receive copies of our Auckland Branch Newsletters. Ian recently sent us a donation from his

IN BRIEF (continued)

Association towards our Newsletter costs and thanked us (not for the first time) for including them on our mailing list. His letter said (in part):- "All of us who read the newsletter find it so full of interest - we do not need to have served in 22 Battalion to enjoy and to appreciate the clarity and honesty with which it is written. We wish you and your members everything of the best for the future".

PIPES & DRUMS OF THE 22ND

(14) Some months ago, I received in the mail a copy of a magazine entitled "SCOTIA PACIFIC", which is the official journal of the Piping and Dancing Association of New Zealand (Inc) and is aimed at keeping the Association's members in touch with Scottish culture and their Scottish heritage. I was a bit puzzled at first as to why this publication had been sent to me but, when I flipped over a few pages, I found that the centrepiece was a full-page article about the history of the 22nd Battalion's Pipe Band and that the writer of the article was none other than EDWARD B (SCOTCH) PATERSON, who was a Pipe Major himself when he was a schoolboy and still plays the pipes occasionally. The full article is a little too long for the space we have available but I'm sure I have Scotch's permission to borrow the following extracts.

(15) One of the many things I did not know was how the Battalion came to have its own Pipe Band. Those responsible for this happening were the Battalion's first C.O., Lt. Col. Les Andrew, V.C., who was himself a keen piper, and a firm friend of his, IAN CAMERON, a Wairarapa farmer who was the National President of the NZ Pipe Bands Association. When Col. Andrew was appointed to the 22nd Battalion, Ian Cameron set out to ensure that the Battalion had its own Pipe Band, by raising funds around the Wellington - Wairarapa - Wanganui area. The result was that the original members of the Battalion set sail in the "Empress of Britain" with 12 sets of pipes and 7 drums. Scotch's article records that the band's regimental march past was heard in Britain, Greece, Crete, Egypt, Syria, Italy and Japan and that the Battalion became widely known for the quality of its marching - "second to none", as Les Andrew liked to say.

(16) The original pipes and drums were destroyed in Crete to keep them out of enemy hands but Ian Cameron ensured that replacements became available after Crete. Army rules did not permit a battalion to have a band on its official strength and our band's unofficial status presented problems. Bandsmen were drawn from the platoons and so, after any action, there was never a full band complement and recruits were always needed. "After one bloody action, the Battalion band was left with only two pipers and one drummer but it so happened that we were out of the line for an unusually long time - four weeks - at a small Italian town called FABRIANO.

(17) "All that time (November 1944), Lt.Col. HADDON DONALD was given 3 months' leave and his place was taken by a greatly respected officer, Lt.Col. "BUZZ" O'REILLY. The day after we reached Fabriano, Lt.Col. O'Reilly called me in and asked me to run a school of instruction for our NCOs along Army School (Trentham) lines. All our NCOs had been promoted in the line and had never had formal training in things like map reading, platoon tactics and weapon training; they had not even had a chance to develop confidence in giving commands on a parade ground. "We're out for four weeks", I said to the Colonel. "Could I run the school in the second fortnight. I'd like to use the first two weeks to get the band to full muster; then, when we march our 80 NCOs to the Town Hall, they'll march like the 22nd always does".

PIPES & DRUMS OF THE 22ND (continued)

"You couldn't get a band together in two weeks!" "May I try, sir?" I left the Colonel to call on a doughty company commander called LLOYD CROSS. "Lloyd, do you know what "Buzz" O'Reilly just said?" "No, Scotch, what?" "He reckons we couldn't get a band together in a fortnight". "Bloody rot!" said Lloyd. And we went around the Battalion calling for volunteers to play the pipes and drums, excused all other duties. We had over 100 volunteers! "JOHNNY MEIKLE, LES STEWART and drummer WILLIAM ("Snow") GORDON SUTHERLAND then set to work, sorting out the "probables" from the "impossibles"; the chanters buzzed away all day and the clicking and rattle of the drums never stopped. Thanks to those intrepid bandsmen (and Ian Cameron) we had our band:- 12 pipers, two tenor drummers, four side drummers, a bass drummer and drum major - playing, marching and counter marching. Two weeks after our arrival in Fabbriano, our 80 NCOs march out smartly behind our pipe band - chests out, eyes front and with a precision that any guards regiment would do well to match. For the next two weeks, they marched to the square every morning at 9 o'clock through streets lined with cheering locals. Lt.Col. O'Reilly took the salute and inspected the NCOs before they broke off for the day's instruction in the Town Hall.

(22)

Editor's footnote:- Have been able to find only one reference to the Pipe Band in our Battalion History:- it's a compliment paid to the pipers by some of the weary marchers who took part in the 100-mile route march prior to the move from Egypt to Italy in October 1943. On the same page, the History records that Cpl. W.J. (John) Meikle was the Battalion's honorary pipe-major from January 1943 to August 1945. John Meikle was living in Wanganui until just recently, when he moved to Levin.

THIRD TIME LUCKY

The above is the heading to a review of COLIN ARMSTRONG's book "Life Without Ladies" written by "T.P.M." (Terry McLeon) and published in The Weekly News of July 16, 1947. Colin's book must be out of print, so that, unless you have access to a copy, there's no way in which you can now read Colin's escape story as he wrote it. T.P.M.'s 1947 review provided an excellent introduction to the book and a good summing up of its contents. Here are some of Terry's opening paragraphs:- "For Colin Armstrong, the third time was lucky. He got away, clean out of enemy hands, to London and then to his New Zealand home. His record was clean and shining. For gallantry in Greece and Crete, he had won the Military Cross. For gallantry in three escapes from P.O.W. camps, he had won a bar to the cross. He had done, one would have thought, enough.

"But Colin Armstrong was still restless for action. He returned to his unit in time to fight in the last three actions of the Italian campaign and he had been promoted to second-in-command of the battalion by the time the NZ Division smashed northward from the River Po in the paralysing, demoralising drive which caused the collapse of German resistance in Northern Italy. The drive ended in Trieste and Armstrong was one of the first two NZ officers into the city on the hectic day of May 2, 1945.

"In the piquantly-titled "Life Without Ladies", he has set down the tale of his three escapes from enemy camps. He has told the tale plainly and modestly. You will not find any reference to show that he felt any particular pride in his achievements, yet he was one of the greatest of the Kiwi escapers and his book is a major contribution to the exciting literature of escape.

THIRD TIME LUCKY (continued)

As most of you will be aware, Colin Armstrong was taken prisoner at SIDI AZIZ during the Libya 1941 campaign. He was then a platoon commander in B Company of the 22nd, his Company having been detached from the Battalion for duty as the defence force for Brigadier Hargest's 5th Brigade H.Q. The rest of the 22nd were fully engaged 5 miles away in denying to the enemy's convoys the use of the main, coast road linking BARDIA and TOBRUK. At dawn on November 27, Rommel's Panzers surrounded and captured Hargest's H.Q., including our B-Company. As the German tanks moved forward, Armstrong shook hands with his platoon sergeant, a farmer named KEITH ELLIOTT. They agreed that it looked like the end of the war for them but, as we all know, both became escapers and both returned to the Battalion.

Armstrong's first escape took place in July 1942 and was from Camp 38 at POPPI, some 40 kilometres from Florence. With the help of 9 other prisoners, Colin and ALLAN YEOMAN (21 Battalion) evolved a plan of escape from a first-floor window, using what has variously been described as a "Heath Robinson device" and as a "Flying Trapeze". Judging by a P.O.W.'s sketch of the device in action, it had a good deal of resemblance to the "Flying Fox" type of aerial transport with which most Kiwis are familiar. The main thing about the device is that it actually worked and enabled both Yeoman and Armstrong to clear the high, barbed-wire boundary fence, though Colin suffered numerous cuts and scratches from tangling with the fence. This escape gave Armstrong and Yeoman just three weeks of freedom. They planned to obtain a small boat that would take them to Corsica from somewhere along the west coast near Pisa but, after reaching the sea quite safely, they were arrested by a suspicious carabinieri who insisted on seeing their identity cards

Colin Armstrong was punished for escaping by being sent to Camp 5 at GAVI; this was in October 1942. Camp 5 was the punishment camp for escapers (the "pericolosi") and it was claimed that escape from it was impossible. It was a centuries-old castle with walls several feet thick. Gavi Castle was more secure, more severe and uncomfortable and held far more "Pericolosi" prisoners of war than the much more widely publicised COLDITZ Castle in Germany. During the next 11 months, Armstrong was involved in many plans to escape from Camp 5 but, it was not until the capitulation of Italy in September 1943 that he and his fellow P.O.W.s saw Gavi Castle for the last time. When the Italian armistice was signed, the castle was taken over by the Germans and prisoners were transferred to camps in Austria and Germany. One chapter of Colin Armstrong's book describes how 10 of the 13 New Zealanders in Gavi Castle in September 1943 managed to escape during the enforced trek to German territory. Armstrong made his second escape when he, Allan Yeoman and a Scottish officer named Tommy MacPherson bluffed their way out of a transit camp at Spittal in Austria. The three headed back into Italy, hoping to contact some friendly Italians and/or to get through the mountains into Switzerland. After some narrow escapes and a good deal of hardship, Armstrong and MacPherson were recaptured by members of a German guard. Yeoman managed to cross into Yugoslavia, where he too was recaptured.

The punishment for Armstrong's second break was a five-day train journey to the other side of Germany, a nightmare trip in freezing weather and in a steel truck in which there was no warmth of any kind. Not an ounce of food was handed out during the whole journey, which ended at Hohenstein in East Prussia. From there, they were taken to a British P.O.W. camp at Thorn on the banks of the Vistula in the Polish Corridor. There were 20,000 prisoners in the camp, most of them captured at Dunkirk. At that moment, Armstrong's future prospects must have seemed to

THIRD TIME LUCKY (continued)

him bleak indeed; he had made two successful escapes only to be recaptured on each occasion and had endured hardships along the way. But it was not long before he began to hear about escape plans that must have sounded far too simple and straightforward to be true. British NCOs, headed by Sergeant-Major Howard of the Worcesters, had the Germans well under control and bribery of the guards was the established custom. On the fourth day, Armstrong and MacPherson were told by a British Corporal that the port of Gdynia was likely to be reopened, shortly to Swedish iron ore ships and that it might be possible, through the good offices of the corporal's Polish girl-friend, to get away in one of the Swedish ships. Passport photos and civilian clothes were arranged for them and they got away from the camp by surreptitiously joining a working party. From there on, there were many alarms and delays but, eventually, they crept aboard a Swedish collier, buried themselves in the coal and emerged only when the ship was well out in the Baltic. So to Sweden, from where they were flown to England in a Liberator.

At the time it was published, "The Dominion's" reviewer described "Life Without Ladies" as the finest personal experience war story to be written in New Zealand and said that it was questionable whether it had an equal among the post-war publications of any country. Other reviewers praised the book for the frankness, simplicity and modesty with which Colin Armstrong told his tale of what one man and his companions suffered and endured and the way in which qualities of determination, courage and endurance were displayed by a great many New Zealanders and others who went "into the bag".

22 BATTALION L W ANDREW VC BURSARY TRUST

It was reported in our November 1994 Newsletter that a special meeting of Branch delegates held at Levin RSA on 12th September had re-affirmed the decision made at the biennial meeting held in Hastings (in February 1994) to perpetuate the above Bursary by setting up a Trust Fund for its future financing and to give all members of the Association an opportunity to make donations to this Fund. The Levin meeting appointed a 3-man Bursary Trust Committee to get the Fund established, the members being:- NORM. CARTER (Wellington), DOUG FROGGATT (Tauranga) and NOEL WHITEHOUSE (Levin). They are well qualified to do this job. Norm is still in practice as a Solicitor in Lower Hutt; Doug was Auckland's Chief Postmaster when he retired some years back; Noel retired quite recently from his Law practice in Levin.

The committee has not yet finalised the wording of the Trust Deed but expects to do so very soon. A target of \$10,000 as the capital of the Trust Fund has been suggested, though it may well be that a capital sum of \$8,000, or even less, would produce enough Interest income to finance the Bursary. An Appeal for Donations letter is to be sent to each member of our Association but it has not yet been possible to get it into the mail. In the meantime, donations can be sent to either Norman Carter, 154 Waterloo Road, Lower Hutt or to Noel Whitehouse, 136 Bath Street, Levin. Cheques can be made payable to 22nd Battn. Bursary Trust Fund. Donations already received include two of \$100 each and donations from 5 widows of former members of the Battalion in memory of their late husbands. I am confident that there will be a large number of comparatively small donations, ranging from \$10 up to about \$50 or more and perhaps averaging \$20 or \$25 each. This project has given each of us the chance to make a contribution, small or large, to a living memorial to 22nd Battalion and everyone who served in it.

Cedric Randerson

"ESCAPE! ESCAPE!" SHE CRIED

(Continuing 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)

Boredom finally made Les and I ask to be taken back to the villages in the valley and the next time the Italians came with food for the officers we left with them. The other four left four days later. When next we all met it was decided that it would be preferable if Les and I remained together and the other four left four days later. When next we all met it was decided that it would be preferable if Les and I remained together and the other four in another party. We went down the valley to the village of Andorno and then on to the mountain over the village of Sant Eurosia. There Les and I stayed for two winters. In all it was eighteen months but it seemed much longer. The other four stayed in a house on the same mountain but over the town of Andorno. We were approximately five kilometres apart.

It was a common thing in Northern Italy for a borough to own the stone huts and land on the mountain surrounding the town or village and lease the same land and huts to the peasant farmers to graze their cattle during the summer months and then took them back to their villages for the winter as the land was all covered with snow. The lessee of the hut that Les and I were staying in used the hut as a hay barn and a larger property below as his residence. They were just shifting to their winter quarters at Pralunga when we arrived.

His family consisted of a college educated boy, Batista, 18 years of age, who was a student school teacher and could speak English, French, German and Italian. The four daughters were Lucia, Maria, 19 years, Freda, 15 years, and a baby daughter of eight months. Batista and Lucia especially were marvellous to us, bringing us food and clothing during the intense cold winter months. Our food consisted mainly of chestnuts boiled in goat's milk or baked, pollenta, which was ground maize made into a paste and cooked with salt added. During the next three winter months when the ground was covered with snow we travelled down to the village of Sant Eurosia in the evenings and joined the peasant families in their sing songs. The people would sing unaccompanied. There was a group of youths in this village, Ernesto, Aldo, Guillianio and Richardo tenors, Luciano base, Sergio and Fredsico altos. The singing from this peasant group was out of this world.

I may mention here that later on after the war ended Les and I heard every opera played in Naples, but in not one did I hear voices to equal those of the peasants. It is strange that in the simplicity of human nature you find true happiness, contentment and sincerity.

To Be Continued

WINNING THE FREYBERG CUP

Thanks to MICK & BETH ANDERSON (New Plymouth), we have the use of a cassette tape of a programme in the Radio series "The Last of the World Wars". Beth rang me a few weeks ago to ask if we would like to borrow the tape and my answer was an unhesitating "yes please". The programme includes commentary on the final of the Divisional Rugby Championship, played at Forli, on December 8th 1944 between the Divisional Ammunition Company (DIV.AMM.)

WINNING THE FREYBERG CUP (Continued)

and the 22nd Infantry Battalion. Those who were there will remember that the field at Forli Stadium was a sea of black mud and that the only score in the final came from a drop kick from the educated boot of our 1st five-eighth, L.R. (LIN) THOMAS. Sadly, Lin died some years ago.

We will probably run this tape (it takes not quite 15 minutes) at our Branch Social Function on April 9th. It's well worth hearing and I'm sure you will enjoy listening to it. (ED.).

THE TREASURER REPORTS

The Branch Treasurer is glad to be able to tell you that you've done it again! Another year has gone by and the Branch is still solvent, thanks to your generous responses to the requests made in these Newsletters for payment of subscriptions and donations. The financial statement for the year just ended will be presented at the Branch function on April 9 but a preliminary calculation is that our income will again have been enough to cover our expenditures, despite an increase in charges made by the firm that prints these Newsletters. The Branch Committee thanks you warmly for your support and encouragement. We are now in a new financial year, so subs are due again. The basic rate has stayed at \$5 since 1987 but this is not nearly enough to meet our Newsletter costs in full, leaving a shortfall that has been made up by supplementary donations, quite substantial ones in many cases.

22nd Battalion Association
PO Box 26-314
AUCKLAND 3

April 1995

Branch Social Function - 9th April 1995

I enclose the sum of \$_____, being:

(1)	Entrance fee for _____ people at \$10 per head	-	\$
	<u>AND/OR:</u>		
(2)	My 1995/96 subscription (& Donation)	-	\$

	<u>Total</u>		\$

NAME (Block Letters): _____ Army No: _____

ADDRESS: _____

(PLEASE RETURN BY 4TH APRIL)