

"Vrai et Fort"

22nd Battalion Association

AUCKLAND BRANCH

BRANCH NEWSLETTER

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NOVEMBER, 1995

A HALF-CENTURY OF PEACE

During this year of grace (1995), the World War 2 allies who scrambled through to victory after six long years of blood, tears and sweat have justifiably celebrated the 50th anniversaries of VE Day (May, 1945) and VJ Day (August, 1945). Naturally enough, the commemoration of VJ Day (August 15) brought New Zealand's citizens onto the streets in even greater numbers than had the celebration of the end of the war in Europe anniversary 3 months earlier. The RSA Review's report of the VJ Day celebration said that:- "In centres big and small, right across the country, whole communities turned out to celebrate the coming of peace 50 years ago".

It could be said that it is stretching the meaning of words a bit to talk about 50 years of peace when describing an era that has been liberally sprinkled with little wars of the brush-fire type as well as with far too many larger conflicts:- Korea, Vietnam, the Falklands war, the Gulf War ("Desert Storm") and the long drawn-out hostilities between Iran & Iraq and between Israel and its Arab neighbours, to name the ones that come readily to mind. But these were localised wars that, while being saddening enough, did not affect anything like the number of countries or the numbers of people who became involved in what is nowadays described as the "Last of the World Wars". Look at it this way:- the period of time that elapsed between the ending of W.W.1 and the outbreak of W.W.2 was two months short of 21 years, with the result that significant numbers of men saw military service in both of these world wars. Had History repeated itself, as History has long been in the habit of doing, World War 3 would have broken out in the late nineteen-sixties and we would, by now, have been in the throes of the fourth world war of the twentieth century.

To what do we owe this half-century free of global conflict? Some might say that it happened because the countries of the world decided separately that the slaughter and devastation of a W.W.3 were just too ghastly to contemplate but I, for one, don't think that this is so. There is no evidence to suggest that every nation on earth has had the benefit of real wisdom among those who have been in power. Was it then because the United Nations has been so much more effectual as an instrument of peace than was the old League of Nations? Here again, the available evidence does not support this as a valid explanation of 50 years of world peace. The U.N. has done well in many directions and as a world forum but its peace-keeping record has not been such as to encourage optimism for the future. Its critics have not been slow to point out just how ineffective the U.N. has been in keeping or restoring peace in places like Rwanda, Somalia and the former Yugoslavia.

The only other possible explanation for this half-century of world peace that seems at all believable is that there has been no world war because of the effectiveness of the nuclear

A HALF-CENTURY OF PEACE (CONTINUED)

deterrent. I know that just to mention "the bomb" is to enter an area of potential controversy but there can be no doubt that the effects of the bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki were so

horrifying that the world has been at peace (though uneasily so) ever since. As one returned soldier put it in a recent letter to the press:- none of our sons (or grandsons) has ever had to fire a shot in anger because "none of the great powers capable of launching global war has dared to face the horror of nuclear retaliation". And, as more than a few thoughtful people have pointed out, it could be a grave mistake to widen the present fervour for banning nuclear testing into a bar-the-bomb crusade that might well bring the era of nuclear deterrence to an end.

Cedric Randerson

ROLL OF HONOUR

453129	B J (BERNIE) ADAMS	Cambridge	27/6/95
37047	J L BARNES	Matamata	18/3/95
77642	E G (GRANT) BORRIE	Auckland	29/9/95
470301	G H BROAD	Kawakawa	22/4/95
37251	L J COPESTAKE	New Plymouth	4/4/95
193079	R (BOB) FERRIS	Blenheim	23/6/95
33630	A G GILLICE	Rotorua	26/3/95
3177	M HICKEY	Auckland	11/1/95
43632	J LAMB	Auckland	3/7/95
	(Sir) SPENCER RUSSELL	Auckland	7/7/95

The Auckland Branch Committee extends its deep sympathy to the widows and families of all former members of the 22nd who have died during the past few months. Two of those listed above were not residents of our Branch area but "Copey" Copestake lived in Auckland until quite recently and Bob Ferris was well-known to many of us, especially to those who were in A Company during the Italian campaign. Grant Borrie was a member of our Branch Committee for 5 years but in 1987 had to stand down because of ill-health. Sir Spencer Russell was, of course, widely known in NZ as a former Governor of the Reserve Bank.

National Roll:- John Bowker, Wellington, who took over the job of Keeper of the National Roll in 1994, has since done a monumental amount of research while compiling as complete a record as possible of the names of all those who served in the Battalion, including those who died during the war and all those who have died since. John has listed the names of over 3000 men believed to have served with the 22nd (enough for 4 battalions). Of the total of 3022, 755 were "originals" and the remaining 2247 were reinforcements. A total of just on 1600 men are known to have died, including 357 known war dead. Former members of the 22nd known to be still alive total 854 and a further 574 men have had to be classed as "AWOL - MISSING - OR DEAD".

John Bowker's dedicated research has uncovered the fact that the names of no fewer than 31 of 22 Battalion's war dead were omitted from the Roll of Honour printed in our Battalion History. John advised all Branches of these omissions several months ago and also told us that an additional 31 crosses had been made and named in readiness for the 1996 National Reunion.

ROLL OF HONOUR (CONTINUED)

Part of the reason for the inaccuracy of the Casualty figures in the "History" appears to be that the names of men who were killed while prisoners of war were (in many cases) simply ignored by the compilers of Unit histories. Did you know, for example, that two ships ("Jason" & "Nino Bexio")

carrying Allied POWs to Italy were torpedoed and sunk by R.N. submarines, the first in December 1941 and the second in August 1942, and that the 934 POWs who went down with these ships included 162 New Zealanders, of whom 23 belonged to 22 Battalion. Makes you realise, doesn't it, just how lucky those of us were who never had the misfortune to be taken prisoner.

LAST MONTHS IN TRIESTE **(With acknowledgements to Rotorua Daily Post)**

With the defeat of the Germans in May 1945 what remained for the 2nd NZEF was relaxation and enjoyment of the fruits of our efforts during a summer in beautiful Trieste.

May and June became a most bizarre time for members of the 22nd Battalion in that we were accommodated in the relative luxury of quite comfortable hotels but had to be on the alert for any hostile action likely to eventuate from our erstwhile allies - the Yugoslav partisans.

Trieste, 90 per cent Italian, was a prize that Tito, the leader of a newly liberated country, coveted as a reward for resisting Hitler's hordes and tying down thousands of German troops who could possibly have been employed elsewhere. The Triestini dearly wished to remain Italian and the situation was rapidly developing into a showdown between the 8th Army on one side and the forces of Communism on the other. With hindsight the situation appeared to herald the first whiff of a tempest that culminated in the Cold War of the years that followed.

Each of the sites occupied by the New Zealanders - these included modest hotels and pensiones - was completely surrounded by these fearsome unsmiling partisans with their hangers-on, whom we came to term "pistol packin' mommas". This was our first experience of being non-fighting occupation soldiers and we made the most of consorting with the Italian inhabitants, being welcomed into their homes and generally enjoying the sobriquet "liberators".

An ugly twist to this idyll was the burden of always being armed wherever we went in case the balloon went up. I personally was thankful that the last arms I was required to wear during the preceding battles was a .38 pistol and I found this a lot easier to manipulate than a cumbersome Tommy gun or a rifle.

These were fairly heady times but we were able to make the most of the recreational facilities that were readily available. Within the city was an extremely well appointed athletics stadium and we enjoyed conducting meetings on this our first experience of anything but a grass track. Our encounters with the local athletes on cinders were mutually enjoyable; the name of Jack Lovelock rang a bell with the local middle distance runners.

There were several rowing clubs in the city and we were able to take advantage of the excellent facilities provided. Only widish clinker-built shells were available but these were extensively used and some time during June a Divisional regatta was held in what had been a

LAST MONTHS IN TRIESTE (CONTINUED)

lavishly equipped submarine basin. My sole rowing experience was as a member of 22nd Battalion's four-oar crew. We trailed the field. I remember being cox of our "eight" as well.

Swimming was another pastime that Kiwis enjoyed and the facilities available far surpassed anything in New Zealand at that time. A very fine Olympic-sized pool had been built out into the harbour in much the same way as the old Te Aro baths had been in Wellington. But there the resemblance ended. It seemed as if a huge concrete slab had been poured over the sea and stadium style spectator seating and a diving tower had been built far exceeding anything we had ever seen. Quite a number of inter-unit competitions were held and I remember a meeting between 22nd NZ Battalion, a Scots Guards unit and representatives of the American Pine Tree Division. I do recall that Kiwis came first, second and often third in almost all of the events. We also played water polo against a local Italian side but I'll draw a veil over the result. It seemed that an Olympic medal team came from this club in 1936.

Another surprising feature of Trieste in 1945 was the trotting track they called The Hippodrome and the meetings were well patronised by many race-starved Kiwis. Towards the end of the sojourn in the city a Divisional race meeting was held and many exponents of the art of harness racing were able to demonstrate their skills and thousands of lire were poured through a most efficient totalisator.

It would appear that Trieste in May and June 1945 afforded tired New Zealand soldiers nothing but pleasure and we made the most of our time there but always we were aware of the threat to our safety and our eventual return home from the same people who are now murdering each other in the Balkans 50 years later.

Even then we considered them a strange and motley lot. Some time late in June an agreement had been reached between the high powers and Tito's men withdrew from the city. Consequently our next move was from the relative luxury of a hotel and into bivvies a few kilometres north-east to the village of Bassovizza. We were there for about three weeks doing soldierly things as well as playing cricket and softball with an occasional trip into Trieste for a swim, a movie or visiting friends we had made during our stay there.

During these pleasurable but anxious weeks we were always aware that even though Europe was now at peace the other part of World War Two was still taking place and as yet no decision, as far as we knew, had been made about the redeployment of 2nd NZ Division. We were still expected to play the role of fighting soldiers and I recall a show of strength by us marching through the city in full battle order with steel helmets and bayonets fixed. It may have worked because shortly afterwards the Yugoslavs withdrew and we moved up the road to Bassovizza. It was about this time that what we called "swanning trips" came into being. Two or three truckloads of us would set out for a distant destination merely on a sight seeing mission and the most enjoyable of these was a day spent travelling from near Trieste to Klagenfurt in Austria. The route lay through the Tyrollean mountains and the unaccustomed sight of wooden dwellings and villages made many of us recall our own Southern Alps. Klagenfurt was untouched by war and a beautiful city it turned out to be.

LAST MONTHS IN TRIESTE (CONTINUED)

At the end of June we withdrew from Northern Italy and headed south to area of Perugia near Rome. The Triestini were sad to see us go and I now quote from the official history of 22nd Battalion with a reference to an editorial in a Trieste newspaper which read - "how could we but love these boys who overthrew the last Nazi and Fascist resistance in our fair city, and who were our guests from May, their youthful pranks with our children, their loyalty and their democratic army".

"Goodbye New Zealand brothers. We are happy that you are returning to your country before you become corrupted like ourselves by this sick place called Europe, where if you stay, she would, with her evil gnaw into you all as she has eaten into us. Goodbye and please try to understand us".

Fairly prophetic words in view of the events current around the Adriatic at this time.

Jack ("Scotty") McMillan

NATIONAL REUNION - WELLINGTON, JANUARY 20/21, 1996

January, 1996 will be here almost before we know it. You should have received the Second Notice of the 1996 National Reunion some weeks ago, so you will know that the Notice gave **November 30, 1995** as the closing date for registration. You need to be aware, too, that this Reunion will be held during Wellington's Anniversary weekend, which means that the Races will be on at Trentham Racecourse and that Motel/Hotel accommodation in the Trentham/Upper Hutt area will be hard to get. The alternative will be to book accommodation at C.I.T. - by 30/11/95 to be there for sure. Registrations, etc should be sent to National Secretary Norman Carter at 154 Waterloo Road, Lower Hutt.

MEMORIAL TO DAVID RUSSELL, G.C.

As most members of our Association know, L/Cpl David Russell was executed by a German firing squad on 25th February 1945 at Ponte di Piave in Northern Italy when, after 3 days of relentless questioning, he still refused to name any of the Italian partisans who had given him shelter and helped him in his self-imposed task of repatriating other escaped POWs. Though he was awarded a posthumous George Cross in 1948, he was for many years the forgotten hero of our Battalion. When he was shot, Dave Russell was buried in the civilian cemetery at Ponte di Piave but his remains were subsequently transferred to the British War Cemetery at Udine.

It has long been the wish of the people of Ponte di Piave that a suitable memorial be erected at the place where L/Cpl Russell was executed and initially buried and, last year, they were assisted by a NZ ex serviceman who lives in Italy to plan the erection of a memorial stone or plaque at Ponte di Piave to commemorate the 50th anniversary of Russell's death. It is pleasing to be able to report that this plan was duly put into effect last February, that the NZ Ambassador to Italy was present at the ceremony and that contributions towards the cost of the memorial were made by the NZ Government, the NZ RSA and the 22nd Battalion Association. The inscription on the plaque tells the story of Dave Russell's heroism and ends with the words:- "Greater love hath no man than this that a man lay down his life for his friends".

"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 evading recapture during the rest of the war in Italy).

CHRISTMAS, 1943

Christmas, 1943 passed uneventfully except that Batista and Lucia called with food which included calf liver, cheese, polenta, tobacco, six caramel lollies and two P.C. Woodhouse books. Whenever the two visited us with food Batista would talk with Les, both being school teachers and having something in common while Lucia and I were quite contented to sit and think. My mastery of the Italian language at that time was poor and Lucia did not know any English. For all that a great understanding came between Lucia and me. Only once did she show an emotional feeling. This was after a Rastramento. By now the thaw had started and so did the Rastramentos by the German and Fascist troops for groups of Italian partisans who were now being supplied with arms by parachute. These groups made raids on the German garrison stationed at Biella and then made off to the villages of Androno, Piedicavello, Pollone, or Pralunga, where they disbanded till later.

Their dash and run episodes, which consisted mainly of sabotage work, caused a nuisance to the German troops and it is now the general tactic used by all guerilla force throughout the world. It is the only type of warfare that gets results with the minimum of casualties.

The best way to dodge the Germans was to go into hiding, so we looked around for a natural cave or a hole not far from the hut in which to hide. We found a hole underneath a huge projecting rock. It was deep enough but not large enough for us to enter, so with a shovel we enlarged the hole so that we could slide in one after the other, feet first, and roll ourselves up into a ball with our feet up under our chins. A very uncomfortable position after an hour or two, but it served the purpose. The second front in France had begun. One evening when we were in the village of Sant Eurosia a partisan invited us to his house in Pralunga to hear the BBC news. On being introduced to his wife she asked, "Are you married?".

Whenever we were introduced to any womenfolk the first question they asked was "Are you married?". Les was married but not me. "Does he have a woman in the village?" she asked. "Hell, no they both live in a hut up in the mountain", said the husband. "Poor fellows", she said, "you should be thankful that you have a woman to sleep with most nights, Jacobo". Jacobo was a funny name to give a person.

We were receiving plenty of sympathy from her, but no food to eat. Her husband was more interested in getting his teeth into the chicken he held in his hand than talking about sex. Feed the hungry and it will work the oracle. Nothing doing, so after listening to the radio for about an hour we made tracks back to the hut, arriving there in the early hours of the morning. On another occasion an 18 year old girl, Sandra from Biella, came to visit us. She had been travelling all night with a letter from a British major who had been dropped by parachute to find out about the resistance groups and the supply of arms. In the letter he stated that the girl was dependable and that he would like us to report to his headquarters.

"ESCAPE! ESCAPE! SHE CRIED (CONTINUED)"

GERMAN REPRISALS

With Sandra I went to the other four near Andorno and it was decided that Pop Walker and myself should go with the girl. We gave instructions that if we were not back within three days it must be assumed that we had been either recaptured or shot. We arrived at the major's headquarters deep inside the partisan perimeter late at night and next morning were interviewed by a British corporal. There were five other NZ escaped prisoners from our work camp there. While giving the corporal the information about the others there was heavy machine gun fire, also mortar bombs in the perimeter.

Not long after two heavily armed partisans with crossed bandoliers on their chests came panting that the Germans had broken through the perimeter and were advancing to the headquarters. Panic reigned and there was a scatter in all directions. On the way back to the mountain Pop asked my opinion, and we both agreed that we were better off in the mountains. After passing Pollone we bid Sandra goodbye and that was the last we saw of her, although we learned later that she had returned to the staff of the major.

Things passed quietly for a while until one night a girl Maria from Sant Eurosia came to visit us. She had been sent by the parish priest who said that we were to leave the mountain overlooking his village as the Germans were coming to recapture the two British and there would be reprisals in his village. The partisans shot Maria's husband as a spy three weeks later. The partisan leaders were well trained for indoctrinisation and interrogations. Early next morning we moved into our hole and remained there all day but nothing happened. Two more days passed without any incident and we were beginning to think it must be but another scare. On the third morning while Les was making breakfast of cooked chestnuts I went to keep guard at the hole.

I had just arrived there when I saw the column of soldiers - about sixty of them coming up the path from the village. They had been waiting there until they had received the very light signal from the troops arriving at the top of the mountain. I rushed down to Les and we both made for the hole after putting out the fire and hiding the pot of chestnuts. At the fork road the column split in two, one going toward Andorno and the other column coming up the path to our hut. They searched Paraldo's property with a tooth-comb and continued up the path to our hut. Suddenly there was a shout, "Lieutenant, we have found the place. There are two dummies, two spoons, a fire, which has recently been put out and two dents in the straw where they have been sleeping".

I WAITED FOR A GRENADE

The lieutenant told the men to spread out four yards apart and to search everywhere. "Here are some footprints in the snow that lead to the huge rock up there!" It was all over. One of them had seen me and I waited patiently for his shout to come out from hiding or a hand grenade thrown in my lap. But the feet moved on and the three bodies sat on the rock above us. We could hear their chattering and occasionally their rifles and tommy guns rattling on the rock. There they stayed until approximately 4 pm. We heard them move off but never saw the column again. While they sat on the rock it gave me time to think.

To be continued

PIPES & DRUMS OF THE 22ND - PART 2

Scotch Paterson's story about the re-forming of the Battalion's Pipe Band at Fabriano, Italy in November 1944 inspired two other Pipe Band experts to voice their recollections of occasions when the Battalion's Pipes & Drums were brought back to glorious life. The first of these occasions was in January 1943, when men of the 8th Reinforcements joined the Battalion in "U" Area of Maadi Camp. At their first Battalion Parade, Lt Col Tom Campbell asked if there were any pipers or drummers among them. Stewart Nairn of Tauranga was one of those who took a pace forward and he recalls that there was a fair bit of experience among those who volunteered and that they were soon playing route march groups in and out of camp with beneficial effects on morale. Stewart also has vivid memories of the part played by the Pipe Band during the 100-mile route march of the battalion from Cairo to Burg-el-Arab just before 2 NZ Div sailed to Italy in October 1943. The second such occasion was in November 1945, when the 22nd Battalion was being re-established to form part of J Force. George Fahey of Palmerston North well remembers that word soon got around that a new 22nd Pipe Band was to be started and it was soon in being, with 12 pipers and 7 drummers. It paraded for the first time on Christmas Eve, 1945 and from then until August, 1946, it was much in demand in Italy and Japan for marches, parades, concerts and dances.

TREASURER'S CORNER

I'm sure we don't need to apologise for asking for money each time we send out one of these Newsletters but a word of explanation will help any recent arrivals in our Branch district. We stopped sending out sub accounts several years ago to keep costs down and because some of our members are more affluent than others. This disorganised way of obtaining subs and/or donations from our Branch members and other recipients of the Newsletters seems to work and we are most grateful to everyone concerned for their continued and generous support, which makes it possible for us to go on producing, printing and sending out the Newsletters. During the past six months and a bit, we received remittances from a good number of people, many of them paying subs for more than one year or sending a substantial donation. If you think a payment is due from you, please use the reply slip below. The official annual sub is still \$5, even though it needs to be at least twice that much.

Cedric Randerson

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November, 1995

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

Name & Address (Block Letters):-

ARMY NO: