

22nd Battalion Association

AUCKLAND BRANCH

Telephone 523 1310

Secretary :

C. W. Randerson

BRANCH NEWSLETTER

P.O. Box 26-314

Epsom

Auckland, 3.

MARCH, 1996

BRANCH SOCIAL FUNCTION - SUNDAY, 14TH APRIL 1996

Yes, the time for our annual Branch get-together has come round again and the indications are that we will once more have an attendance of 50 or more, including those who journey to Auckland for the day from north of the city, from the Bay of Plenty and from places in between. For the past few years we have scheduled these gatherings for a weekend close to Easter and this year the Sunday chosen is the one after Easter Sunday. Those of you who went to Wellington for the National Reunion held there in January will already know that the next "National" (1998) is to take place in ROTORUA, which is in our Branch territory. You will hear more about this coming event on April 14.

As usual, the proceedings at Grey Lynn RSC next month will be informal and almost entirely social in character. We will, as our Rules require, spend a little time on a Branch AGM but this won't interrupt the social side for long. **PLEASE** use the Reply Slip in this issue to send us **your pre-payment by mail**. This will give us the essential numbers that the caterers must have as well as saving the Treasurer much hard work at the door. **Please send back the Reply Slip** even if you are unable to be there, enclosing your sub payment for the 1996/97 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 am (promptly)
Luncheon: To start between Noon & 1 pm
Close down: 3 pm

VISITORS: Your friends & relatives are most welcome. *as always*

THE COST: \$11 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 9/4/96**.

ROLL OF HONOUR

48570	L V BERRIDGE	Whangarei	7/12/95
67761	A W DEMPSEY	Hamilton	30/10/95
438079	A W HOGAN	Kawerau	20/6/95
30660	G W (BILL) HORNER	Auckland	30/1/96
555215	J MEIKLE	Levin	22/9/95
456304	R G (RON) MOULDEN	Auckland	6/3/96
6802	C J OLSEN	Taihape	14/4/95
6250	J D W ORMOND	Waipukurau	8/3/95
6974	J B SIMPSON	New Plymouth	24/10/95

Most of the above-named were residents of our Branch area but we have included two from other branches whose Army numbers indicate that they were among the original members of 22 Battalion and J (Johnny) Meikle, who spent most of the post-war years in Wanganui and is well-remembered for the key part he played in the Battalion's Pipe Band. 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. We will remember them.

THE RACE TO TRIESTE

Whether or not he was there in person, every former member of 22 Battalion knows (or should know) that 2 N.Z. Div led that last mad dash into Trieste and that the 22nd was in the van and got there first. BUT, when (Lt Col) HADDON DONALD was doing some research last year, for Auckland writer LAWRENCE WATT, he was amazed to find that the official history of the 20th Armoured Regiment laid claim to the 20th having been first into Trieste and that the history of the 12th Lancers made exactly the same claim. Haddon sent us a fair bit of documentation on the subject of who got there first and our Battalion History also gives it good coverage but, regrettably, does not make the situation crystal clear. Our "history" records that the last advance of 76 miles on May 1, 1945 was one long triumphal procession (though there was some resistance close to Trieste itself), that 9th Brigade led 2 NZ Div and that the leading elements of 9th Brigade were:- a troop of 12th Lancers scouting ahead; 2 troops of 20th Regt; A & D Companies & Battn HQ of 22 Battalion; Brigade HQ; General Freyberg; the rest of 22 Battn; the Divisional Cavalry Battalion. The only real argument appears to be over whether the tanks of 12th Lancers and 20th Regt were acting independently or whether they were under Infantry command. Haddon says that they were under his command as C O of the leading Infantry battalion.

On May 2, the day on which the German armies all surrendered unconditionally, 22 Battalion began to advance towards Trieste at 8.30 am, closely followed by Div-Cav Battalion. After an enemy post at Sistiana had been dealt with by one Infantry Platoon, supported by carriers and a tank troop, Col Donald and a troop of 12th Lancers pushed on into Trieste as an advance party, while the rest of the Battn, with the tanks, were held up by a road block. Col Donald sent his 2 I.C. (Major) Colin Armstrong back to bring up the tanks as a show of strength and also radioed back to hurry the rest of the battalion and the tanks forward. The 20th Regiment's tanks and the main body of 22 Battalion reached Col Donald's position about half an hour after the advance party. Our "history" records that "by 4 pm, the battalion and supporting forces were making a triumphal entry into the city". The "supporting forces" would undoubtedly be

THE RACE TO TRIESTE (CONTINUED)

the 12th Lancers and the 20th Regiment's tanks and these tanks would certainly have been under command and not acting independently. Without question, says Haddon, the Unit in command that first entered Trieste was the 22nd Battalion. The case rests.

Editor

1996 NATIONAL REUNION

Other commitments prevented me from attending the National Reunion held in Wellington on January 20/21, 1996, so I am unable to give you a report on it but National Treasurer J A (Aus) Riddell of Palmerston North told me in a letter I had from him in late January that the Reunion was a very successful occasion, that the C.I.T. venue was ideal and that the weather could not have been better. Aus had no official attendance figures but he understood that more than 270 attended the Sunday Luncheon. Our Branch delegates were greatly impressed by one of the speakers at the luncheon - a Regular Army officer who had served with the peace-keeping force in Bosnia and was sent over from there to Northern Italy as one of the NZ representatives at the ceremony held at Ponte di Piave in February 1995 to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the death of L/Cpl David Russell, G.C. Ponte di Piave was the place where this unsung hero of our Battalion was executed by a German firing squad and initially buried (refer to report in the November 1995 issue of this Newsletter). Contributions to the cost of the memorial plaque erected last year were made by the Government, the NZ RSA and the 22nd Battalion Association.

1998 National Reunion:- The only other happening of consequence at Wellington was the successful bid by J G (Scotty) McMillan to obtain the approval of the Meeting of Branch Delegates on January 20 for his proposal that the next National Reunion be staged in Rotorua. Scotty is one of our Branch's Vice-Presidents and his bid had the official backing of our Branch Committee but, when the chips are down, the members of the Rotorua Reunion Committee (Scotty already has several volunteers) will have full responsibility for the planning, organisation, funding and conduct of the 1998 Reunion.

Editor

MUSSOLINI VISITS LIBYA

R N (BOB) WOOD was at one time Intelligence Officer, 19th Battalion but was later a Company Commander in 22 Battn. These days, he lives at Warrawee, Sydney but he is on our Branch mailing list, enjoys reading our Newsletters and recently sent us a story, hoping that we would find it suitable for the Newsletter. We have and here it is:-

Those who, like me, were captured by the Germans at Ruweisat Ridge on 15 July, 1942 will recall their journey across Libya under Italian guards, packed about fifty to each truck and trailer. All were hungry and thirsty and many were in poor shape with dysentery.

They will also recall the excitement of the numerous guards as they shouted "IL DUCE! IL DUCE!" when the convoy came to a halt. We disregarded the orders not to leave the trucks and many of the sufferers lowered their trousers to answer the call of their illness while the rest of us strolled about to stretch our legs. Sure enough, there was the great MUSSOLINI, clad in a smart

MUSSOLINI VISITS LIBYA (CONTINUED)

uniform, carrying a small machine-pistol and strutting along and looking us over. I'm afraid that the strollers did not show any more respect than did the squatters.

I recently received from a friend who is an eminent historian at Oxford an extract from the diary of Count Ciano, who was the Italian Foreign Minister from 1927 to 1942 and who was Mussolini's son in law. It gave an account of Mussolini's visit to Libya which, I think, was intended to be followed by a triumphal entry into Cairo. The entry for 21 July, 1942 includes this sentence, which will bring joy to the hearts of any survivors of the journey mentioned above:- "He (Mussolini) told me that he had found groups of fierce-looking New Zealand prisoners who were so far from reassuring that he always kept his gun close at hand".

The diary excerpt also gave an insight of the rift between Rommel and Mussolini and the arrogance of the Germans. He complained: "German motor vehicles do not yield the right of way to anyone, even to our generals and at the slightest opportunity of acquiring A LITTLE BOOTY, THEY TAKE EVERYTHING".

As a footnote to his story, Bob Wood adds this message:- Having been absent from NZ for many years, I have lost touch with many of my fellow prisoners but I hope that this letter will reach some of the survivors, will be of interest and, perhaps, bring a smile to their venerable wrinkled faces.

EBP RETURNS HOME

E B (Scotch) Paterson is back in Auckland. More precisely, he has returned to that large island in Auckland's Hauraki Gulf whose inhabitants have a distinctive life-style that makes WAIHEKE a place apart from the rest of New Zealand. Some years ago, when Scotch retired from his occupation as an Engineering Consultant, he and his wife Pat moved from Auckland City to Waiheke and they continued to live on the island until Pat died in 1992. At that time, Scotch sold their home and moved to Wellington to live (at Ngaio) with his son Mike Paterson and Mike's wife and daughter. Then, last year, the Mike Patersons departed these shores and are at present in Scotland, where Scotch was born - about 84 years ago. For the rest of 1995, Scotch lived in a flat in Rosalind Street, Ngaio while completing a course of University study! He had been invited to join Mike and family for Christmas but reports of the rugged winter that Scotland was enduring caused that visit to be postponed. He is writing a book instead and may be contacted at 8 Korora Road, Oneroa, Waiheke Island (Phone: 372 8779).

About that course of study, Bill Lawrence of Waikanae sent me a cutting from the Evening Post of 22/12/95. It includes two photographs of E B P and headlines the fact that, at 84, he was finishing a degree course that he began in the 1930s and that he seemed likely to become Victoria University's oldest graduate. He had begun his degree (in Philosophy) at Auckland University in 1931 but had to give up his studies when his family ran out of money during the Depression. Now Scotch has completed the degree he began over 60 years ago. The letters after his name read:- MC; BA; FIMC; FIMH.

Editor

JOINING THE OCTOGENSIA

You may feel that you have seen or heard that strange word "OCTOGENSIA" before but I haven't found it in any dictionary - in fact I've just invented it as a generic term that refers to those members of the human race who have reached and passed the age milestone of four-score years and so have begun yet another decade of life on Planet Earth. By dictionary definition, an octogenarian is "a person 80 years old", which surely means that anyone who attains the age of 81 ceases at that time to be an octogenarian! That's why we need a new word like "octogensia".

It's not all that long ago that the biblical 3-score years and 10 was close to being the maximum term of years that people lived on this planet and anyone who got to be 80 or over was a bit of a phenomenon, but medical science has kept on increasing the length of life expectancy, with the result that people in their eighties are now commonplace. The statisticians tell us that our womenfolk have a longer life expectancy than do we males, which is borne out by the fact that there are many more widows around than there are widowers.

What prompted me to write in this vein is that, having joined the Octogensia fairly recently, I have found myself wondering how many years I have to go and asking myself silly questions like:- will I still be around at the turn of the century? I have never previously been troubled by depressing thoughts of this kind and I know that they are at least partly due to the medications that I now take every day and to spending too much of my time in the waiting rooms of GPs and Specialists. And I'm very conscious that there are many people in my age group and quite a few who are younger than I am whose state of health is a lot worse than mine. So I have resolved to stop feeling sorry for myself and to get on with life. For the remaining survivors of War service in 1939/45, it matters little whether we are under or over the 80 mark. The best thing we can wish for ourselves and for our families is that we can retain all or most of our physical and mental faculties until the time comes for us to end our days on Earth peacefully and with dignity.

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 evading recapture during the rest of the war in Italy)

THE GRENADE THAT DIDN'T COME

I realised that Providence had protected us. The prayers of the parish priest and the people of Sant Eurosia for our protection had been answered. Prayer is the most powerful force in this world. I am glad that Pope Paul was once a parish priest in one of these mountain villages. He has learned humility before taking over the great responsibility of his Church. Both Les and I are religious but I am not a fanatic. I do not hold with the idea that the Jews, Hindus, Mohammedan, Bhuddist and other religions must be wrong. Religion is healthy if taken in moderation and one is realistic.

That evening we decided to go down to the village and let everyone know that we were safe. Our first call was at Ernesto's house. I knocked and we walked in when told to enter. The whole family was in the kitchen waiting for the evening meal. I hope never to see again the sight I saw then. The whole family had turned as white as sheets on seeing us. Poor Mama was the first to break the silence. She dropped the wooden spoon she held in her hand and said "Oh Patricio" and wept. I comforted her while Ernesto's father was telling Les that the Germans had spread it around the village that they had recaptured the two English and had taken us to Biella.

"ESCAPE! ESCAPE! SHE CRIED (CONTINUED)"

There they said we would be questioned and made to give the names of all the people in the village who had helped us and that these people would be shot and their houses burnt. The German and Fascist troops were still in the village and we had no right to come to their house and endanger them. We were to leave immediately and stay in hiding until his son Ernesto came and told us that all was clear. We later learnt that the family never told anyone that we were safe.

Only they and the spy concerned would know. But Mama came to our rescue. "Have you eaten, Patricio?" And when I shook my head. "They are not going back into the cold without something to eat". Then she dealt us each a bowl of vermicelli soup which they could ill afford. Bless her heart. It is most probable that none of these kind-hearted people will ever be repaid for the help that was given at their own and family expense.

We made back toward our hut and after getting our army greatcoats and blankets from the hole in which we had hidden them, I threw a boulder on the stone roof of the hut and listened. Sure enough there was some whispering inside. That night we slept out in the snow beside the dug-out. At approximately four the next morning we slid into the hole again. About 8 am I saw a grand sight. Five columns of troops marching up various tracks, up the mountain again.

One column was coming back on the track to our hut, but the three soldiers who had slept the night did not wait for them but went down to meet them and they all continued up the mountain. The following day Ernesto came and told us that the Germans had left the village but we must stay in hiding because of the spy or spies who were there. The people did not know that we were still safe so nobody came with food for us. A day or so later I went to find out how the other four had fared. They had a similar experience except that the patrol did not come anywhere near their hide-out. They gave me what food they could spare.

FEROCIOUS DOGS

A week later I decided to go to Pollone and ask for food. I was reluctant to do this but had no other choice. The Germans sometimes had a sentry box stationed at Pollone and I was sticking my neck right out. Some of the farmers were returning up the mountain with their livestock. One or two of these people kept ferocious dogs - a cross between a wolf and an Alsatian and they would attack if let loose, so it is advisable to carry a staff when travelling. On this occasion I had a staff about seven feet long and four inches in diameter. As I was passing through a property one of these wolf-hounds came bounding down to me with barking and snarling.

I turned to face him and held my hands steady. He slithered to a halt a yard from me and still snarling showed me his fangs. To defend oneself the staff must be held firmly in both hands about a foot apart and parallel to the ground. When the brute leaps for the throat the staff is pushed slightly forward so that his jaws snap on the wood, then twist the stick so that it is vertical to the ground. If done quickly there is no weight on the stick and the result is a broken neck for the dog. But the owner had reached the brute before he could spring.

"You are English?" he asked. "What makes you think that?" I replied. "The way you faced the dog. Why did you not use the road that runs beside my property?" he queried.

"You idiot", I said, I would not be a free man now if I used the roads. Do you mean to tell me that you deliberately set the dog on me?" He told me that he had a son who was missing since the Armistice and spies kept coming to see if he had returned home. He said that he might have some bread and cheese for me. We parted as friends.

Walking on the cobblestones through Pollone I felt a hundred eyes watching me. As I passed some of the houses I waved to the very old women standing on their upstairs verandahs.

"ESCAPE! ESCAPE! SHE CRIED (CONTINUED)
FEROCIOUS DOGS (CONTINUED)

They knew by my marching with hob-nailed boots that I was British and would have warned me if there was trouble ahead.

Nothing happened so I crossed the main street and continued my journey up the next mountain. That night I slept in the shed with the cattle. They are very warm creatures but I would not recommend that one should sleep with them permanently during the winter. The air gets rather thick and heavy. Early next morning I set off again loaded with a sack of food that had been collected for me by a villager who had been friendly to us previously. I arrived back safely.

Meanwhile Batista's father had returned to the mountain and was inspecting his property. He was amazed to see Les and me, thinking that we had been recaptured and it was not long before Batista and Lucia knew we were safe. I was chopping wood the day they came to visit us. I continued chopping, waiting for Lucia to regain her breath after the long climb. Then I turned and called "Lucia" and held out my hands to greet her.

LUCIA WEPT

She flew into them like a homing pigeon and placing her sweet scented head on my shoulder, she wept. This was rather embarrassing so I turned round to the others but they were the same. Some people are sentimental and can turn on the tap at any moment.

But please do not think that I am heartless. My mother died when I was seven years of age and my younger brother was then only five years old. Since then I have had more than my share of disappointments. Yet a wise man from India once told me that with my deep thirst for knowledge I would possess more wisdom at forty years of age than most people could attain at twice that age. His words have been proven true.

"Oh Patricio", said Lucia, "when will all this end and you will be able to return to your home?" Not knowing the answer there was no reply. One week later while I was chipping blocks of ice from the creek to melt so that I could have a bath or sponge down and Les was making the usual breakfast of cooked chestnuts I heard a shout. On turning in that direction I saw two heavily armed partisans standing about ten yards apart. They had me covered with their Tommy guns.

To be concluded (in next issue)

DESERT DAZE

It was several days after the breakout at Alamein in 1942. B Coy were digging in on a sloping area, somewhere near the coast I think. I'm not sure what we were digging in for, probably to pass the time away but, as a new Corporal, I wasn't really privy to the strategy being undertaken. We were spread out over the area and, in my mind, I can see the overall picture of that moment.

So, there we were, busy doing what we were good at when, from the direction of what would have been the rear of our position, came at a steady pace a vehicle. No ordinary vehicle was this. It was a German machine of the kind they used for cross-country work, very high off the ground and seating about six, including the driver. As it passed through our position, everybody did the same as me - we just watched and wondered. The vehicle was occupied by the driver (naturally) and three or four others who, as they passed me, I realised were German officers. And we all said:- "goodness me". They drove right through our position, sitting calmly as they went, obviously not expecting any salutes and disappeared from our area.

DESERT DAZE (CONTINUED)

There may be a sequel to this story but I don't know it and I've never heard it mentioned since. Obviously a chance for fame went by my gaze, as it did for so many others. Where did those enemy officers go? Surely, all the troops between us and the front line, if there was one at that time, didn't miss that very cool group of German officers.

RON JONES

WANGANUI BRANCH

50TH ANNIVERSARY: The Wanganui Branch of our Association held its very first meeting on February 23, 1946. This month (March 4), it held a special function to celebrate its 50th anniversary. Congratulations to the Branch members and especially to Branch President MICK CONDON and long-serving Branch Secretary LES CLARK.

TREASURER'S CORNER

At the start of a new financial year, it is good to be able to report that our Branch funds are still in good shape. Our financial statement for the year ended February, 1996 is expected to show a small deficit but this will follow several years when we have had modest surpluses, giving us a useful reserve to fall back upon. To save costs, we stopped sending out sub accounts some years ago, leaving it to Branch members and others on our mailing list to contribute according to their means. In practice, this system has worked very well, thanks to the many who respond generously to the general requests that we send out. The Branch Committee thanks you all for your support and encouragement. The basic rate of subscription has been held down to \$5 for the past 9 years but that rate is not nearly enough to meet our Newsletter costs in full, the shortage being made up by many supplementary donations, very generous ones in a lot of cases. Your continuing support has made it possible for us to go on publishing the Newsletters.

22nd Battalion Association
Box 26-314
AUCKLAND 3

March 1996

Branch Social Function - Sunday, 14th April 1996

I enclose the sum of \$_____, being:

- | | | |
|-----|---|----------|
| (1) | Entrance fee for _____ people at \$11.00 per head | \$ _____ |
| | <u>AND/OR:</u> | |
| (2) | My 1996/97 Subscription (& Arrears) Donation | \$ _____ |
| | <u>Total</u> | \$ _____ |

Name & Address (Block Letters):-

ARMY NO:
