

## ***22nd Battalion Association***

AUCKLAND BRANCH

Telephone 523 1310

Secretary :

C. W. Randerson

### **BRANCH NEWSLETTER**

PO Box 26, 314

Epsom

Auckland 3

**APRIL, 1998**

### **BRANCH SOCIAL FUNCTION - SUNDAY, MAY 3 1998**

You will note that our annual Branch get-together is, for the first time ever, being held in the merry month of **MAY**. We decided to hold it a little later in the year than usual to avoid having it too close to the National Reunion that took place in Rotorua last month. These gatherings at Grey Lynn RSC continue to be well attended, even though many of us are less mobile than we were a year or so ago, and, as usual, we expect to have quite a few people from north and south of Auckland present, as well as those who haven't got far to come. Among others, Jack (Scotty) McMillan of Rotorua, who did such a fine job as Convenor of the National Reunion Committee, will be there to tell us the news (good, we understand) about **ROTORUA - 1998**.

**Will there be any more National Reunions?** If you weren't at Rotorua and haven't heard since, the answer to this question is YES:- Hawkes Bay Branch has undertaken to stage one in the year 2000.

In keeping with our normal practice, the programme on May 3 will be informal and almost entirely social in character, though we will, as required by the Rules, devote a **little** time to a Branch AGM. As always, we **DO** need to hear from you **whether or not** you are able to come. **PLEASE** use the Reply Slip to send your **pre-payment by mail** - this gives us the numbers for the caterer and makes life a whole lot easier for the Treasurer, who prefers NOT to be on full-time duty at the door. If you **can't** make it, **please use the Reply Slip** to send us your sub payment for the 1998/99 financial year and any further donation to our funds that 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 relatives and friends will, as always, be most welcome.

**THE COST:** \$15.00 per head (plus Subscription and/or Donation)

#### **BAR:**

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

**PLEASE FILL IN THE REPLY SLIP NOW** and send it with your remittance in time to reach the Treasurer **by Wednesday, 29/4/98**.

### ROLL OF HONOUR

444293	A F (MICK) ANDERSON	New Plymouth	18/3/98
4553	I D BELL	Hamilton	21/1/98
6971	D L GEORGE	New Plymouth	22/11/97
44437	J C (JACK) GROVES	Auckland	30/3/98
443550	S N D INGRAM	Waitara	25/10/97
30035	L C MORGAN	Auckland	20/3/97
76654	J H MORRIS	Wellington	29/12/97
30089	L E SMYLLIE	Blenheim	20/11/97
433374	R J STEWART	Foxton	6/12/97
21543	R W (BILL) TASKER	Hawera	25/2/98
30562	N TREWEEK	Plimmerton	6/12/97

Of the men listed above, the best known to us in Auckland was MICK ANDERSON, who was a highly-valued member of our Branch Committee for 10 years (and a Vice-President for the last 3 of those years) up to 1976, when he and his wife Beth moved from Auckland to Hamilton. JACK GROVES was also well-known in Auckland and never failed to attend our Branch functions. We extend our deep sympathy to the widows and families of all former members of the Battalion who have passed away in recent months.

Editor

### 1998 NATIONAL REUNION IN ROTORUA

I'm sure that those who attended the March 1998 National Reunion in the "Sulphur City" will join with me in expressing hearty congratulations to our Rotorua sub-Branch on their organising and running of a most successful and enjoyable event. Especially entitled to our grateful thanks are JACK (Scotty) McMILLAN, who acted as Convenor from start to finish, and one of his principal assistants, JACK ANDERSON, ex-22 Battalion in Japan and current President of Rotorua RSA. Scotty had other helpers, too, but I won't attempt to name them all here.

The programme was well-planned and well-presented, the catering was first-class and Rotorua turned on almost perfect weather. How many attended? Including one ex-22 Battalion man from the UK and five from Australia, the final muster was well above the budgeted attendance figure of 250 people and probably reached the 300 mark at the formal luncheon on the Tuesday. The Rotorua RSA's main hall can accommodate 250 people but that extra 50 above budget made the luncheon tables a little too close together for complete comfort.

The March Past and outdoor memorial service on the Tuesday morning were kept short to allow for the average age of the marchers; worthy of note is the fact that, despite the number of sticks and other walking aids in evidence, more than 150 men were still able to march with commendable precision. Sadly, there may not be another opportunity for such a march.

The 22 Battalion L W Andrew V C Bursary Trust: A full report was presented at the Meeting of Delegates on the Monday afternoon by NOEL WHITEHOUSE of Levin and copies will be sent to Branches and National Officers. Main items were: (1) The Trust Capital had reached the target figure of \$10,000 by December 1997 and has since been increased to \$12,000 or more by a very generous donation of \$2,000 from the Levin RSA. There had been 200 individual donors up to 31/12/97. (2) An Honours Board will be provided at Horowhenua College to record the names of all past recipients of the Bursary, as well as future winners. (3) In terms of the Trust

## 1998 National Reunion (continued)

Deed, the remuneration of the permanent Trustee (the NZ Guardian Trust) is estimated to cost about \$120 per year, which is expected to leave the fund with enough income to support an annual Bursary of at least \$500 per annum.

**The Memorial Crosses:** The decision to cease displaying the Crosses at National Reunions was not made lightly by the full Meeting of Branch Delegates and National Officers held at the Rotorua RSA on March 16, 1998. This proposal was one of several that had been pre-circulated in December 1997, giving everyone ample opportunity to consider them carefully. For half a century, the Crosses have been put on display for just a few brief hours in every second year, which means that, for at least 99.75% of the time, they have been boxed up, and stored away. They have long been a major concern for the Branch due to host the next National Reunion, the problem of storage being only one aspect of this. There have also been the work entailed and the financial cost of cartage, maintenance, general handling and security against vandalism.

This year, only one of the Association's Branches was prepared to accept the job of staging a "National" in the year 2,000 and Hawkes Bay made it clear that their offer was a conditional one. They were unable to accept responsibility for the Crosses, and there would be **NO** Parade, **NO** March Past and **NO** outdoor memorial service. Had these conditions not been accepted by the Delegates Meeting, 1998 would have been our last National Reunion and the Crosses would have had to go in any case. It was a hard decision but an inevitable one, dictated by the passage of time.

Cedric Randerson

## THE LAST ACT

**(From the book "MATES & MAYHEM" - by Lawrence Watt)**

### **(1) SETTING THE SCENE:**

In late April, 1945, World War 2 in Europe was in its final stages, both in Germany, where Berlin would fall on May 2, and in Italy, where 2 NZ Division spearheaded the 8th Army's dramatic final offensive that saw the awesome destruction of crack German units, including the paratroopers at whose hands the New Zealanders had suffered embarrassing defeats on Crete and at Cassino. As the German resistance crumbled, 2 NZ Division played the leading role in the race to the port city of Trieste, where they were to find themselves in a situation potentially as dangerous as any they had encountered in battle during the war - one that could have been the start of a new war, against the Yugoslavs.

The port of Trieste had long been a bone of contention between Yugoslavia and Italy and Tito was now determined to make it a Yugoslav city. In pursuance of this objective, Tito's partisans arrived in Trieste on April 30, just two days before 2 NZ Division got there. So it happened that May 2, 1945 was the start of the fortnight-long stalemate that followed Trieste's occupation by soldiers from two separate armies, not to mention some well dug-in German troops who had been ordered to surrender but justifiably feared reprisals from Tito's partisans and were intent on surrendering to the Allies only. The New Zealanders were there as peacekeepers but, from Tito's partisans' point of view, they were just getting in the way. The partisans were an ever-present danger for the whole of that fortnight and their behaviour, a harbinger of the Balkan situation today, prevented the New Zealand soldiers from savouring the peace until well after the war was officially over.



## THE LAST ACT (continued)

The New Zealand troops who were the first to reach Trieste were the 22nd Battalion, under Lt Col Haddon Donald. He had been the battalion's commander for just over a year, having previously been a platoon commander in Greece and Crete and a company commander in North Africa.

### (2) HADDON DONALD TAKES UP THE STORY:

The last month or so of the war was a very busy and exciting time. We would often be on the go until two or three in the morning, after getting on the road at 7.30 am. There was always something happening - getting around blown bridges, across streams, dealing with pockets of German resistance. There were several reasons for both the change in feeling and for the success of our advance.

Firstly, I knew that the 22nd Battalion was very well organised and highly motivated. Our troops would anticipate virtually every move without needing direction. Everybody had his job down to a fine art.

Secondly, having good weapons and knowing how to use them properly was a big reason for our mobile infantry battalion doing so well in the war's final act. One of the most useful weapons we had was the Sherman tank. It was a very effective assault weapon, because it could move along winding roads virtually at the same speed as a truck, while still possessing a powerful gun. The rubber-tyred armoured scout cars used by the 12th Lancers, an English unit which was attached to our battalion, also proved their worth.

Cooperation between different units was the third reason for our success. While many a battle in modern warfare has been lost through poor cooperation between the forces, there was now a high level of collaboration between the army and air power - if necessary, we would call up a squadron of fighter-bombers to bomb and strafe the enemy before we attacked on the ground.

Artillery was, undoubtedly, the main support weapon for infantry. Artillery dealt blows which were both physically and psychologically stunning to the enemy. It clearly made our job as an infantry unit much easier - enabling us to move in to close quarters. Obviously there was nothing new about using artillery, but by this stage it was very well coordinated, using information which had been radioed in from forward tanks or infantry, or had been sent from spotter planes. Good communications were the key.

The fact that we didn't stop in any one place for very long was another reason we kept casualties lower than in previous battles. Wherever our battalion carried out an attack I tried not just to reach the objective, but to keep the momentum going. Keeping on the move made it very difficult for the enemy to establish his gun lines and register our positions.

We also avoided establishing ourselves in obvious places marked on the map, which the Germans could easily fire at using their map references. It was a hard-won lesson based on experience. Earlier in the Italian campaign I had been caught by a mortar stonk, which seemed at first to have come from out of the blue, in the middle of the night. Next day I saw that the well we were camped by was marked on my map - as it would have been on the German maps. It was clearly the German artillery's practice to plaster places where troops were likely to be concentrated.

Finally, our communications were much improved. I was able to keep in touch pretty well with both my commanders and with the armoured scout cars and tanks through the portable radio in my jeep. Back in Africa our portable sets had been cumbersome and unreliable.

## THE LAST ACT (continued)

The methods we were using were really not too dissimilar from the blitzkrieg techniques developed earlier by the Germans. Using air power and artillery to soften up the enemy and then moving in quickly with tanks and men enabled our infantry battalion to be highly effective and yet keep our own casualties as low as possible. Our experience at night-fighting tipped the balance, giving us what was, on the whole, a superior technique over the Germans.

As we neared their homeland, the Germans had at first fought very hard, but now, in the last half of April, it was obvious they were in a very subdued state of mind. Some would put up a bit of resistance, but others really wanted to surrender to people who would treat them fairly and reasonably. This meant surrendering to us, rather than to the Yugoslavs coming from the east.

We suspected the Yugoslavs were taking reprisals for the terrible way many Germans had treated both their army and civilians. So I felt that a major duty, during these final few days of a protracted and bloody war, was to accept the German surrender wherever I could, and so reduce bloodshed.

Many Germans had not given up completely, though. There was the odd arrogant German who - even in defeat - thought he was a member of some superior race. Some of these were reluctant to surrender, some remained conceited and disdainful. Of course, there was nothing like an artillery bombardment or being plastered by fighter-bombers to knock the stuffing out of them.

The Germans had a naval base and a supply depot at Trieste, so it was not surprising that the troops we came up against there were well equipped. They had 88 mm anti-tank guns and 105 mm howitzers and were well dug-in. There were both garrison troops and tough, mobile stormtroopers in and around Trieste. Our battalion alone would take thousands of prisoners over the last few days of the war, many times our own number.

To someone wondering how the advancing Kiwis appeared, 22nd Battalion's order of battle went something like this. A troop of attached English Lancers in armoured scout cars was often patrolling in front. A troop of Bren gun carriers would lead our battalion, attached to a company of infantry in three-ton trucks. Next would be a troop of Shermans, more Bren gun carriers, another company of men in three-ton trucks, more tanks, with Battalion HQ and more tanks with the reserve company in the rear. B Echelon, the supply group, would be some miles further back. I normally travelled in a jeep anywhere within the battalion column, but usually with the leading company. We were now a modern, motorised unit with plenty of armour and firepower. Regrettably, casualties had reduced the battalion's size down to about 600 men, although I felt the high level of commitment of the men made us at least as effective as a normal full-strength battalion (800 men). When travelling, the brigade, with its associated trucks, tanks and artillery, would spread out for miles on the narrow, winding, northern Italian roads.

So on April 29, 1945, we were the leading battalion for the advance into the north Italian city of Trieste, the last major city to be occupied by Allied troops during the Italian campaign.

Our first significant obstacle was one of Italy's larger rivers, the Piave, which is a little north of Venice. The Germans had blown all of the bridges in this region, but we found a disused ferry which they had missed. We soon had it repaired and after getting C Company, under Major Cross, over before dark, I received a message over the radio that we were moving too quickly. At the time, could I be sure how well I had *really* heard this message? So we carried on, getting the whole battalion across the next morning. Our Shermans were too big and heavy for the rickety old ferry and crossed at a ford about 10 km further up-stream.

## THE LAST ACT (continued)

There was no opposition on this ferry, although 27th Battalion - on our right - was held up by a large enemy force. We started to move pretty quickly, but encountered some German resistance soon after crossing, taking about 150 prisoners. We sped through a number of villages and at virtually every one people came out cheering, with flowers and wine. They also gave us very good information about the *Tedeschi* (Germans).

I felt the atmosphere begin to change from this initial feeling of elation soon after we had passed through a village called Cervignano. The local people were apprehensive about Tito's men coming from the east and his supporters had written pro-communist slogans everywhere: *Zivio Titol Zivio Stalin!* and also *Tokay Je Jugoslavia!* (This is Yugoslavia). *Zivio New Zealand*, said another, written by the inevitable battalion wag.

We encountered the first Yugoslavs at a town called Monfalcone where General Freyberg and his staff interviewed their leading commander. We were hoping to meet the Yugoslav commander of the whole region, but he didn't show up. We didn't get very far with the others so pushed on.

Being under attack is a serious business, but in retrospect you can look back at its humorous side, and one incident at this time caused quite a chuckle. It was just before we were to set off for Trieste, with Brigade HQ and Divisional HQ following behind us. My second-in-command, Major Colin Armstrong, was following immediately behind Divisional HQ, accompanied by a motley collection of journalists eager to cover the final advance to Trieste, the closing act of the Allied thrust through Italy.

Suddenly, a German machine gun opened up in front. I sent a Bren gun carrier and a platoon of infantry to deal with it. This proved to be fairly straightforward but Colin had meanwhile noticed that the whole of the Divisional HQ, Brigade HQ and all of the journalists had disappeared, our battalion vehicles being the only ones left in sight. We soon dealt with the obstruction and the general, brigadiers and the journalists were able to emerge safely from the cover they had, I was told, hastily taken.

The advance continued. There was a series of actions during the daytime on May 1. During most of these the Germans would fire at us, then we would return fire, usually from tanks or Bren carriers. Despite having plenty of firepower the defenders usually lost heart when they saw tanks heading straight for them!

As we got closer to Trieste we could frequently look down on the sea from the coast road. From such a vantage I suddenly saw below me three German motor torpedo boats heading along the coast. They were just within our tanks' range, so I ordered two of them to let loose. At first the tank commanders seemed surprised to be ordered to fire at boats - but as the Navy often fires on land positions, why not reverse the situation? I saw one of these boats catch fire, while the others escaped.

A little later I saw an incident which showed how stupid behaviour caused casualties. A jeep carrying a British naval captain and an American naval officer came screaming around the corner from behind us, heading for enemy lines. Of course we warned them to stop, but they just kept going like bats out of hell towards the enemy. A German machine gunner cut right through them. To this day I have no idea exactly what they were up to, they seemed to be totally on their own. Our stretcher bearers picked up and took away the two badly wounded men.

The next day, Wednesday May 2, would effectively be the end of the war against Germany, and a million German troops surrendered in Italy on this day. We didn't officially hear about the surrender until well into the day.



## THE LAST ACT (continued)

We had to wait up for a while that morning. Aerial reconnaissance had spotted a garrison of Germans, heavily dug in and defended with 88s, at a huge castle, called Miramare, on a peninsula on Trieste's outskirts. At about 2.30 pm we waited for some time while fighter-bombers strafed and bombed their positions. As soon as the bombardment had abated I approached tentatively in my jeep, along with the Lancers.

Suddenly a German colonel appeared on the road in front of us and flagged us down. "We have heard of the surrender on our radio", he said. Obviously the fighter-bombers had also softened them up quite a bit, as it hadn't been long since we had heard about the surrender ourselves.

I got one of my company commanders, Captain Jock Wells, whose forward troops had already made contact, to complete the surrender. It was quite a large garrison, about 600 men and 15 officers, about the same size as my own battalion. Wells occupied Miramare Castle and remained there till it was taken over by General Freyberg with Divisional HQ.

I took the German colonel with me in my jeep as an interpreter and liaison officer. We set off towards Trieste with the leading troop of the 12th Lancers soon after 2.30 pm. The city centre was just four miles away and the way was clear, as the Germans in the city had been alerted that we were coming. They briefed me about the situation in the city, explaining that all the Germans were waiting to surrender to us, except the SS Guards who were holed up in the Tribunale (law courts) building in the city centre. I felt that the Yugoslavs were very aggressive and, I believed, quite anxious to take over the city and capture the entire German garrison. The SS were the last obvious centre of resistance.

We headed for the Tribunale and established a temporary headquarters in a building in a side street across from the square, where I could keep the SS stronghold under observation. We were the first Allied troops to enter the city, but although the locals were friendly, there was little opportunity for celebration. The situation was tense.

I radioed back to the Battalion HQ to hurry the remainder of the battalion forward with the tanks, but received a report that they were held up by a roadblock soon after leaving Miramare. I guess the roadblock had let us through because we had the German commander with us, or else for some reason it had been unmanned.

How to deal with the SS troops in the Tribunale was the most pressing problem. They had already fired on Wehrmacht troops who had tried to induce them to surrender. As the war was supposed to be over I thought that if I appeared and appealed to the SS commander to surrender, on the promise of safe custody back to the Allied POW camp, further bloodshed could be avoided. So I set off across the square unarmed, holding aloft a large white handkerchief. I demanded to speak with the commander. The windows were literally bristling with machine guns but eventually two German officers appeared at the door. In a mixture of broken German and Italian I tried to get my message across. The two SS officers conferred briefly and the door was then slammed in my face. I left, feeling very vulnerable.

Brigade Command next came on the air for advice on whether the general's entourage and Brigade HQ should make a triumphal entry into the city from where they were waiting in the suburbs. I advised them that things were not yet under control, with a lot of random shooting going on, so they held back. The Yugoslavs were very much in evidence and an armoured column of their tanks patrolled the streets.

(To be concluded in our next issue)

**MARCHED IN**

Since Rotorua, two new names have been added to our Branch Roll. They are:-  
B C D (BRIAN) SMALLER, 225B Papamoa Beach Road, Mt Maunganui

and:

TOM ROBINSON, 17 Ardagh Place, Howick, Auckland.  
(Tom has moved to Auckland from Palmerston North).

Alo sighted at Rotorua was S W (SHARKEY) IHAKA, who lived in North Auckland for a good many years but told me at the Reunion that he was moving to Hawkes Bay, where his address will be:- 803 Clive Street, Hastings.

**TREASURER'S CORNER**

Our financial statement for the year ended February, 1998 is expected to show a surplus of just over \$300, more than enough to extinguish the previous year's deficit of \$180 and a heartening response to my gloomy report of March, 1997. As most of you know, 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. Thanks to the many who respond generously to the requests we send out, it continues to be possible to publish the Newsletters in the present format. The Branch Committee thanks you all for your support and encouragement. Our official sub has been held down to \$5 p.a. for the past 11 years, though it needs to be at least twice that much to meet our Newsletter costs in full.

Cedric Randerson, Hon Treasurer

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April, 1998

22nd Battalion Association  
Box 26-314  
AUCKLAND 1003

**Branch Social Function - Sunday, May 3, 1998**

I enclose the sum of \$ \_\_\_\_\_, being:-

(1) Entrance fee for \_\_\_\_\_ people at \$15.00 per head \$

AND/OR:

(2) My 1998/99 Subscription/Donation

\$

Total

\$

Name & Address (Block Letters):-

Army No: