

22nd Battalion Association

AUCKLAND BRANCH

Telephone 523 1310

Secretary :

C. W. Randerson

BRANCH NEWSLETTER

PO Box 26 314

Epsom

Auckland 3

NOVEMBER, 1998

MEMORIAL WINDOW AT WAIOURU

Earlier this year, all Branches of our Association were notified of a proposal to install at the Waikouru Military Museum a Memorial Window to commemorate 22 Battalion's participation in the 1939/1945 conflict and in J-Force. The idea began with HADDON DONALD, who had heard that there was scope for this type of Memorial at Waikouru and submitted a firm proposal to National President ALF GEORGE of Hastings. This was followed by lengthy discussions and careful consideration of design, wording, colouring and other aspects, such as finance. Some differences of opinion as to wording emerged along the way but these appear to have been satisfactorily resolved. The inscription is to include a list of the countries where the Battalion served (including Japan), as well as a list of all the major battles from MT OLYMPUS to TRIESTE.

In submitting this proposal to the Association, Haddon Donald offered to make initial payment of the full cost (expected to be in the vicinity of \$1,500), subject to reimbursements as and when funds became available - for example from contributions made by other members of the Association who wished to be personally involved. The financial side could, perhaps, best be handled by Hawkes Bay Branch between now and the National Reunion planned for the year 2000. When we last heard, the concept of a Memorial Window was reported to have made a favourable impression generally and the project seems certain to go ahead in the near future. On behalf of Auckland Branch, congratulations have been sent to everyone who has been directly involved in the preliminary discussions.

Cedric Randerson

WAR AT FIRST HAND

The recently released Second World War movie "SAVING PRIVATE RYAN" has made a profound impression on those who have seen it - on post-War generations as well as on yours and mine. The NZ Herald of 21/10/98 printed a letter from one of the younger viewers of this film that included these words:-

"I felt moved by this picture, more so than any movie before, and doubtless any I will see in the future. I pray that I may never have to witness the horror that those men saw and pray also that I may experience the friendships that they found in each other. I am eternally grateful to all those who offered their lives so that we may live in peace. I salute all those who made the offer and paid the price, as well as those still alive today who fought in any conflict to maintain peace and freedom. They are owed a debt far greater than the world can pay. I hope this movie will have a similar effect on others. Those who fought are all heroes".

The survivors of 2 NZ Division's 1939/45 campaigns would scarcely claim that they were "all heroes" but most of us would endorse the other comments of the Herald's correspondent. We certainly experienced at first hand the futility of armed conflict as a means of settling international disputes.

Editor

ROLL OF HONOUR

6567	J L BARTON	Masterton	19/6/98
4119	C A BAYNES	Wanaka	29/4/98
30395	D R C BOND	Dannevirke	12/2/98
634809	N W DEVEREUX	Auckland	15/10/98
254631	J R E (John) DOBSON	Christchurch	10/5/98
30646	A R FROMONT	Wanganui	22/6/98
6367	A W GLEESON	Upper Hutt	3/7/98
494275	A W HASLETT	Takapuna	23/6/98
491930	K H (Ken) JOBLIN	Auckland	21/7/97
45825	J S McCOUBRIE	Raetihi	22/7/98
32800	D H McDONALD	Feilding	21/8/98
5687	E R C MOFFAT	England	26/8/98
30600	R H (Ray) MOLLIER	Kaukapakapa	20/8/98
45121	C C (Carl) RING	Auckland	20/2/98
44198	J D ROSCO	Wanganui	1/7/98
38872	N R SMITH	Wellington	1/3/98
440651	R A (Ron) SPOONER	Wanganui	8/8/98
31089	B J WILSON	Dunedin	1/7/98
35724	L (Laurie) WOOLCOTT	Lower Hutt	7/5/98

Yes, it's a depressingly long list this time. As we are unable to guarantee either its completeness or its total accuracy, the list is subject to the standard disclaimer - Errors & Omissions excepted.

Of the Auckland Branch members whose deaths have been recorded this year, easily the best-known were CARL RING and RAY MOLLIER. Carl Ring was the Battalion's M.O. for a lengthy period in the M.E. and in Italy. Back in civilian life after the war, he had a distinguished career as a Medical Practitioner (Eye Specialist) in Auckland. Though he was always known in the Battalion as Carl Ring, his full name was CHARLES CALVIN RING.

RAYMOND HENRY MOLLIER was one of the Battalion's "originals" (in "A" Company), rose up through the ranks and, after furlough in NZ and an OCTU course in the UK, returned to A Company as an officer in the closing stages of the Italian campaign. He is also well-remembered for his prowess as a Rugby half-back. Ray transferred from Hawkes Bay to our branch 3 years ago when he went to live with his daughter Jane and son-in-law Brian on their farm just north of Auckland.

KEN JOBLIN's son, Peter Joblin, wrote to notify us of his father's death but also said that Ken often used to pass our Branch Newsletters on to him and that he (Peter) would like to go on receiving them, if our rules allowed it. Our reply to this request was (in effect):- Welcome aboard, Peter.

Editor

DAVE RUSSELL'S GEORGE CROSS

Very pleasing to hear that DOUG RUSSELL, a nephew of L/Cpl DAVID RISSELL, GC, had travelled from Perth, Western Australia to lend his Uncle's posthumously-awarded medal to the Army Museum at Waiouru. Appropriately, the handing over ceremony took place on Armistice Day. It is close on 54 years since Dave Russell was executed by his German captors in Italy.

THE LAST ACT (continued)

(Concluding HADDON DONALD's account of the dramatic race to TRIESTE that ended World War 2 in Italy and 22 Battalion's role in the confrontation with TITO's Yugoslavs - from the book "MATES & MAYHEM" by LAWRENCE WATT).

The German officer who had come with us and my headquarters had in the meantime been in constant touch both with their various strongholds and with the German commander at the Castello San Guisto, situated on a hill near the middle of the town. Hard pressed by the Yugoslavs outside, he was particularly anxious to surrender, so with company commander MAJOR LLOYD CROSS, I set off to assess things, in armoured cars followed by the company in trucks and a troop of tanks. The castle was exposed and there was indiscriminate shooting going on so I suggested to Lloyd that he use his tanks to cover the advance. I then returned to our temporary Battalion HQ.

It was a bit dicey getting up the steep winding road to the castle. A considerable force of Yugoslavs had surrounded it and were sniping at anything in sight; an enthusiastic German let off an anti-tank rocket at one of our tanks, but it missed. When C Company and the tanks got to the castle gates, the Germans opened them and Major Cross completed the surrender details.

LLOYD CROSS was regular army, a Duntroon man and used to ceremonial occasions, so he took a formal surrender from the German commanders. The Germans piled up their arms and saluted vigorously. It was a real ceremony! Meanwhile, one of our platoons manned the casement windows to defend themselves against the Yugoslavs outside. Tito's troops continued to snipe away at anything that moved in the castle throughout the evening.

The Yugoslavs' sniping outside, directed even at our stretcher bearers, made it impossible to deliver the men's rations during the dark. No matter, the Germans offered to share theirs, so former enemies lined up for a hot stew together. While they dined inside the castle, no doubt the odour of cooking was detected by Tito's people outside. They asked several times to be let in. They were refused, Cross told me later.

Clearly getting pretty hot under the collars the Yugoslavs continued to snipe away. After sharing their meal the Germans suggested that they could help us. "We are all in danger here from these communists. Allow us our weapons back and we will fight alongside you, New Zealanders and Germans!" said their commander, presumably intending to hand the weapons back to us afterwards. Only too aware of the consequences of fighting with the enemy against an ally, Cross was politely non-committal about this gesture.

At daybreak the German prisoners were taken by truck from the castle to prisoner of war cages outside of town, while the indignant Yugoslavs watched as their prize slipped through their fingers.

I had meanwhile returned to the Tribunale building with an Austrian interpreter and my intelligence officer, TERRY McLEAN, later to become the sports writer for the *New Zealand Herald*. We once again marched across the square under a white flag, to talk with the SS commander. As we approached, machine guns quickly appeared again and I distinctly recall a series of clicks as they were cocked. "The war is now over, you must surrender. If you do not, I will get my tanks to surround this building and blow it apart!" I said to the SS commander.

However, they clearly wanted to make a fight of it. In a very cutting manner he answered that he "wouldn't surrender to any bastard." So we turned and walked across the square with our backs to them. I remember that walk, only too well aware of those guns trained on us, as one of the longest in my life - it seemed we were walking across a football field. In retrospect I think the whole lot of them were pretty drunk and, with their egos bolstered by booze, were looking for some "death or glory" action. We discovered afterwards they had plenty of liquor, in fact, a large pile of war loot, including a good store of champagne (Verve Cliquot) and silk stockings.

By this time I was fed up with the SS troops, so I told the Yugoslav liaison officer that we would blow up the building and he could take the prisoners. We had done our best to treat them humanely but they had rejected our offer so I left them to their fate. Until now we had not fired a shot since entering the city, but it was time to show the Germans and the Yugoslavs that we meant business.

THE LAST ACT (continued)

I ordered the tank commanders to surround the building and open fire. The noise was terrific in that confined space. Dust filled the air.

The drunken Nazis had picked a good place to hole up. The Tribunale building walls were made of three foot stone and I could see that the initial fire was not making much impression. So I told the tank commanders to blow in the windows and doors. They fired off all their ammunition, until their guns were red hot in the evening light, having a really good time, particularly as nothing was being fired back.

As the shooting started, a large group of local civilians suddenly came pouring down the stairs of the surrounding buildings - holding their heads and shouting, "Mama mia" - no doubt wondering why the war had started all over again. We calmed them down and, after the tanks had finished, explained what was going on. I returned to my HQ.

A little later the Yugoslav officer came up to me and asked if I had any petrol. When asked what he wanted it for, he replied that the SS had retreated to the building's cellars and he wanted to burn them out! "I'm afraid we have none to spare," I said.

Apparently having sobered up, the Germans then gave themselves up quietly. The Yugoslavs marched them away in the early hours of the morning. It was the last thing I heard of them. I can only guess what ultimately happened.

It was the following day (May 3), I think, that I saw a special edition of an English paper with a front page headline, "COLONEL DONALD fires the last shots of the war in Europe," followed by a small story on the shooting up of the Tribunale. We didn't appreciate it at first, but this was the last time that New Zealand troops fired on the Germans and possibly the last shots the Eighth Army fired against the Germans in the Italian campaign. There were, of course, several actions in other theatres after this point.

That night I next took German GENERAL LINKENBACH's surrender. Linkenbach was commander of the whole Trieste area and his headquarters were in a villa on top of a hill, which the Germans had turned into a heavily armed fortress. At nearly midnight (May 2) our battalion intelligence officer, LIEUTENANT CURRIE, went up under white flag to parley with him.

It wasn't until 3.00 am that Linkenbach actually gave himself up, but he said he wanted to formally surrender directly to GENERAL FREYBERG, so I drove him back to Miramare Castle, where the general was now staying. Freyberg's aide knocked on his door, waking him up. I discussed the matter through the doorway, but no! He did not want to talk to the German. General Linkenbach just had to surrender to me instead, said the general.

On the way down from Linkenbach's HQ Currie had had to bluff his way past some Yugoslavs who had stopped them, so I agreed to send up some trucks and escorts to bring the Germans down from the fortress. Currie then escorted Linkenbach back to his headquarters, returning with more than 800 Germans, whom he took to the POW cages near Monfalcone. It had been a pretty eventful day. I felt relieved as I headed for the Hotel Regina in the early hours, where my second-in-command had set up our Battalion HQ.

The final surrender was out of town to the north of the city, at a village called Villa Opicina, where the Germans were still holding out. Here CAPTAIN WELLS, commanding our A Company and several supporting tanks, began to negotiate the surrender of a large force of about 1500 Germans. Right in the middle of these negotiations, the Yugoslavs opened fire on Wells' unit with small arms and mortars. They killed one of our men and wounded another. How bizarre that our men had to shelter with the enemy from one of our allies. How repugnant that this "ally" had caused our last battle casualties after the war was officially over. The dead man's funeral was held the next day.

Wells was able to find what was apparently the Yugoslav command post. I went up with Major Donnelly and a troop of tanks to the German HQ and then in a Yugoslav scout car to their HQ intending to talk with them. But in the meantime a Yugoslav liaison officer had come down to our Brigade HQ and Brigadier Gentry sorted the thing out. Reluctant to risk any more New Zealand lives, the brigadier conceded the Yugoslavs would take the German unit's surrender - the last of the German surrenders.

THE LAST ACT (continued)

Other questionable Yugoslav actions included taking Italian partisans prisoner. When the Yugoslavs moved into Trieste they found that the partisans were running the essential services of the town, such as telephones and radio. They soon took them over. As far as Tito's followers were concerned, virtually all Italians were *fatizi*. We didn't think much of Tito's partisans making prisoners of our allies, who had fought against the Nazis. Goodness only knows what happened to such prisoners - I suspect many of them were trucked off to Yugoslavia.

MAJOR ARMSTRONG made a reconnaissance trip to find a suitable battalion headquarters, appropriating the best hotel in town, the REGINA. "Si, grazie," they would be delighted for some of our troops to protect the hotel from the Yugoslavs. With the full staff at our service, for a week or so we lived in complete luxury.

Now the official surrenders of the German troops were completed, we attempted to celebrate ourselves and held a victory dinner with the hotel's chefs doing their best with our army rations. The Yugoslavs were still firing away outside so we stationed armed sentries on the doors. While the rest of Europe celebrated the end of hostilities, we toasted to victory and peace with tracer rounds from Yugoslav machine guns seen clearly outside the hotel's windows. I don't think the Yugoslavs were aiming at us, but it was undoubtedly a gesture of intimidation. Still, it didn't deter us from enjoying Verve Cliquot from the German general's supplies.

Our stay in the plush Regina didn't last. After little more than a week the Yugoslavs said they wanted it for some of their top notch staff from Belgrade to stay in. We gave it up reluctantly but moved to very pleasant quarters above the city centre provided by hospitable and pleasant Italian civilians.

With the war over our role was effectively one, where possible, of peacekeeping, stopping the Italians and Yugoslavs from killing each other, and then preventing the Yugoslavs from taking the place over and committing atrocities.

We were definitely not in Trieste to start another war. We had no mandate to use force to stop the Yugoslavs from doing anything. We showed no weakness, but we also made no show of aggression. We made sure there were plenty of troops visible and that our tanks and artillery were at a state of readiness.

With six years of war at last behind us this should have been a very happy time, but the situation with the Yugoslavs just got in the way. It was a flat and disappointing end to the war.

Hardly a day went by without one incident or another. If just one such incident had blown up, it could have meant a major fight on our hands. Tito's people were often provocative. At any place where we had more than a few grouped together, it was their common practice to put down a machine gun nest and point the gun at our troops. Our usual tactic was to just call their bluff and ignore them, but on one occasion they planted a machine gun nest right outside a brigade headquarters. A show of force was the best way to deal with such provocation, so we sent a tank to sort things out. The gunners soon packed up when they saw the tank bearing down on them! All the time we avoided being overtly aggressive, but by the same token didn't show any sign of weakness. We always had plenty of troops about and made the presence of our tanks obvious.. We had a contingency plan to evacuate the city if necessary rather than start a new war. Fortunately, it wasn't necessary to use this plan.

The Yugoslavs were shooting in civilian areas, apparently at random. I had no doubt that they killed innocent people, but this appeared to decline over time, as we did what was in our power to reduce bloodshed.

On the whole, our strong but unprovocative approach seemed to work, although as we had already had one man killed and two wounded by the Yugoslavs, we were well aware of the danger. I would have been highly disillusioned had we suffered any more casualties.

I found it very difficult to get close to Tito's partisans, although some Maori soldiers, a proportion of whom were partly of Yugoslav descent and who seemed to have a natural bent for languages, managed to get closer. Dealing and negotiating with the Yugoslavs was arduous. In particular, it was a futile hope to expect them to make decisions. Even when you thought you

THE LAST ACT (continued)

were talking to the right man, there always seemed to be somebody higher up, further back in the hills. It was a line stopping, as far as we could tell, with only Tito himself.

In order to break the ice a little, GENERAL FREYBERG decided that we have football matches and even a race day, but what's the point of playing if, despite friendly gestures, nobody talks afterwards?

You could distinguish the Yugoslav partisans by a red star or red sash of some sort. They were rather motley but they had a reasonable uniform. Most were in their 20s or 30s, but many were very young - in their teens - and young girls served along with the young men. Despite the ragtag appearance we regarded them as a cohesive force, with significant fighting prowess. We respected them for having holed up so many German divisions over a very long period.

Fortunately we were considerably better equipped - for example, we had 30-ton Sherman tanks compared with their much smaller American Honeys. And where we had our three-tonners they generally had horse-drawn carts as if out of World War 1. Many of them, however, both boys and girls, had automatic weapons. Overall, though, we were much better organised and held firm control.

The Yugoslavs used a few underhand techniques in their attempt to give the impression that Trieste's inhabitants wanted their city incorporated into Yugoslavia. For example, they organised a protest march with some partisans dressing in civilian clothes, pretending to be loyal to their cause.

Our own experience and personal feelings were anything but sympathetic to the Yugoslav cause. The majority of the town was Italian, people who were hardly in agreement, either nationalistically or ideologically, with the Tito-Yugoslav crusade.

I can understand that the Yugoslavs must have felt very frustrated that we had stolen the march on them. Trieste was a wealthy city, it would have been a real prize for them, but it would have been short shrift for most of the population, who were of Italian descent.

The Yugoslavs looked dejected as they left the city on June 12. They had been thwarted from their goal of gaining disputed neighbouring territory as their own. We were relieved to see them go, having seen little of the fruits of victory.

Soon after we had arrived in Trieste I had been intrigued by a grand looking villa on the slopes overlooking the city. It appeared that we might be stationed there for some time, and it occurred to me that we might perhaps be able to establish a country club for the battalion officers where we could meet and relax in pleasant surroundings when off duty. I talked it over with Major Armstrong and off we went to investigate. We were warmly welcomed by the owners, the SEVASTOPOLOU family. Their old established home, VILLA VALERIO, was situated in an eastern suburb which had been overrun by Tito's forces. We were the first Allied troops they had seen. They were concerned about Tito's partisans, who were prowling around their street and in the grounds at all times, both day and night. They gladly accepted a section of C Company troops, who were stationed in the villa.

It wasn't long before the Sevastopolous suggested that we have a victory ball - the battalion could provide suitable young officers as partners, and food and drink, as the city had been looted by Germans. Our hosts could provide the city's most eligible young socialites, who had been starved of normal forms of entertainment for the duration of the war. We could produce about 40 officers from the battalion and with a few special friends and male members from the Sevastopolou family we set the limit at 60 couples. As the date drew near, the Italian count responsible for recruiting the girls was besieged by requests for invitations - it was more than his life was worth, to keep the numbers below 90. So at the last minute we had to call on the British Navy for reinforcements - after they had escorted us around the world and rescued us in Greece and Crete, who could possibly be more reliable in our hour of need? The naval officers filled the gaps in our numbers admirably.

THE LAST ACT (continued)

Jeeps and staff cars brought the girls to the villa. As host with the Sevastopolous I lined up to welcome the guests. After years spent in the Army I was staggered by the array of beautiful young women who kept appearing through the entrance door into the grand hallway. Each was more beautiful than the previous one in my eyes, but alas, when the last one had been introduced I looked into the ballroom and saw they had all been snapped up by partners as enthusiastic as myself. There didn't appear to be any girls unattended. Then, as if she could read my mind our hostess said, "Don't worry, Colonel, I've saved the most beautiful girl in Trieste for you!" Well, she was right, my night was made. For us, the victors and the saviours of Trieste, it was a magical evening, celebrated with a banquet, including strawberries and champagne (that Verve Cliquot again, captured from the Germans).

It was during the meal that one of my stronger memories of the evening came. These high society girls were so hungry. Watching them eating ravenously and without inhibition - really letting their hair down - I wondered just how bad things had actually been for them. It was soon evident that many of these once wealthy families were forced to sell off many of their valuables to be able to buy food to exist on. It was wonderful that the war was over, but for the civilian caught in the middle of a clash of major world powers and ideas, the suffering had not ended. If this was how the wealthy families had made it through, how much worse it must have been for poorer folk. When the time came for us to leave Trieste we had one last gathering at our country club, which had become a second home to many of us. As a parting gift MADAME SEVASTOPOLOU presented us with a silver rose bowl which had been in their family for years. Its inscription reads: "To the Liberators in the 22nd New Zealand Battalion, in memory of the unforgettable days at Villa Valerio, Trieste, May/June 1945."

We left these friendly people with nostalgia in our hearts. After the shaky start it was an apt climax to a long and arduous war.

AUTHOR'S FOOTNOTES

At the end of Haddon Donald's story, Lawrence Watt, the author of "MATES & MAYHEIM" added these notes:-

GENERAL TITO eventually gave in, after negotiations led by US President Roosevelt. Most of the partisans in Trieste then packed up and left.

According to Kay's Official History of the 2nd New Zealand Division in Italy, in early June, a dejected, dispirited group, about the size of a division, left for Yugoslavia. By June 11, 16,000 Yugo-slav troops on foot, about 400 vehicles and guns and over 1000 horses were seen straggling along the roads from Trieste to Fiume, and there were also further sightings on another route, the roads east of the Isonzo River. After most of the Yugoslavs had gone, New Zealand's 9 and 6 Brigades were joined by battalions from the 91st United States Division and the Scots Guard. The Kiwis stayed until late in July.

Tito had not given up entirely, though; some troops remained and harmony did not come to Trieste easily. A peace treaty, signed in Paris on February 10, 1947, created a free territory administered by UN troops. It was not until 1954 that an agreeable settlement was worked out - it involved partitioning the territory between Yugoslavia and Italy and making Trieste a free port. This arrangement helped revitalise the shipping trade lost between the wars.

Lieutenant Colonel Donald was awarded the D.S.O., the M.C. and the U.S. Legion of Merit, as well as being mentioned in dispatches twice.

After the war he returned to his family business in Masterton. He was National MP for Wairarapa between 1963 and 1969 and was leader of the New Zealand national rifle team several times. He now lives in Taupo.

BURSARY TRUST AWARD - SEPTEMBER, 1998

A few weeks ago, Horowhenua College (Levin) hosted 20 members of our Association who attended an assembly at the school to present the 22 Battalion LW Andrew Bursary to Deputy Head Boy JOSH HARTWELL, the award winner. This was the first award made in terms of the Bursary Trust Deed that came into operation in 1996. The branches of the Association that were represented at the presentation were:- Hawkes Bay, Manawatu, Wairarapa & Wellington. Auckland Branch was represented (indirectly) by NOEL WHITEHOUSE of Levin, who played a central part in the setting up of the Bursary Trust and sent me a full report on this year's presentation. Noel also reported that the Honours Board giving a list of award winners is now on display at the college.

Although, as reported to the meeting of Branch delegates held in Rotorua last March and passed on to readers of these Newsletters, the Bursary Trust Appeal reached its target (with the help of a generous donation from Levin RSA), Noel and the other members of the Special Bursary Committee would like the appeal to continue - this to counter the escalating cost of tertiary education and the declining value of our dollar. Donations can still be sent to National Treasurer Aus Riddell at 31 Montgomery Terrace, Palmerston North.

Editor

FROM THE TREASURER

Former members of 22 Battalion who have not previously received our Branch Newsletters may wonder why we ask for Subs and Donations every time we send one out. It is because we stopped sending out Sub accounts over a decade ago in order to keep down costs and because some of our members are better off than others. Our official sub is still \$5 per annum though it needs to be at least twice that much to meet the costs of processing, printing and mailing the Newsletters in their present format and circulation area.

There was an encouraging response to our last (April) issue but we have still to hear from quite a few people this year. If you think or know that you are one of them, please use the reply slip below. Your donations are gratefully received.

Cedric Randerson, Hon Treasurer

November, 1998

22nd Battalion Association
Box 26-314
AUCKLAND 1003

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

Name & Address (Block Letters):-

Army No: