

22nd Battalion Association

AUCKLAND BRANCH

Telephone 523 1310
Secretary :
C. W. Randerson

BRANCH NEWSLETTER

PO Box 26 314
Epsom
Auckland 3

MARCH, 1999

BRANCH SOCIAL GATHERING - SUNDAY, MARCH 21, 1999

Please note the CHANGE OF VENUE:- We've been using the upstairs Dining Room at Grey Lynn R.S. Club for so long that it was a shock to hear that this venue is not at present available; they've lost their caterer and have no replacement in sight. Instead, our annual social get-together will be held at the **Pt Chevalier RSA**, which is well-known for its reasonably-priced Restaurant meals; it's also readily accessible and handy to a **free** car parking area. If you are approaching Pt Chevalier from the City side, the RSA's building is on your left just before the Pt Chev shops and is separated from those shops by a Service Station, a 2nd hand car yard and a short no-exit street (Parr Road) that leads to the free car park.

We always have people from well out of Auckland at this annual do - from as far away as Wellsford to the north and the Bay of Plenty to the south. Sadly, some of the regulars of past years are no longer with us but we should still number over 40 people. Our programme for March 21 will be as informal as we can make it, but we must hold a short AGM (see Treasurer's report on back page). 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 the caterer must have and makes the Treasurer's job so much easier. If you can't make it, **please use the reply slip** to send us your sub-payment for the coming financial year and any further donation to our funds that you feel able to make.

VENUE:

Pt Chevalier RSA
1136 Great North Road
Pt Chevalier
(Phone: 846-8673)

TIMES:

Assemble at: 11 am (promptly)
Luncheon: To start between Noon & 1 pm
Close down: 2.30 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 on sale throughout.

PLEASE FILL IN THE REPLY SLIP NOW and send it with your remittance in time to reach the Treasurer **by Wednesday, 17/3/99.**

DAYLIGHT SAVING ENDS

Though this wasn't why we picked it as the date for the above gathering, March 21 will also **bring the current period of daylight saving to a close.** So, don't forget to put your clocks back by one hour before you go to bed on Saturday, March 20. You can defer this task till 2 am next morning if you feel you really must comply with the official notice explicitly. This is the occasion when, to make the time readjustment less painful, the benevolent powers that be allow us an extra hour's sleep.

ROLL OF HONOUR

045360	W F ANDREWS	New Plymouth	9/11/98
43870	V S (VIC) BLUNDELL	Brisbane	29/10/98
447369	A M BRAMLEY	Auckland	22/1/99
41227	J F BRAY	Wanganui	13/12/98
228245	L H FAULL	Stratford	13/8/98
250056	E FRITH	Rotorua	1/2/99
25155	M G (MAURICE) GANE	Auckland	15/12/98
811696	M G GERRARD	Levin	28/11/98
41625	R GRAMMER	Palmerston North	7/11/98
244912	SWJ GREEN	Levin	12/12/98
60490	D HAGUE-SMITH	Tauranga	7/11/98
33059	A T HOUSE	Whangarei	21/12/98
34044	L L (LESTER) JURD	Auckland	1/1/99
6806	J McDONALD	Te Puke	13/11/98
269936	W G O'DONALD	Wanganui	30/8/98
407312	J (JACK) PEPPER	Auckland	13/1/99
451731	RLC PETROWSKI	Hastings	26/11/98
Not known	E L (LEN) PHILLIPS	Pipiwai	15/2/99
68694	I J SUTHERLAND	Te Awamutu	12/4/98
631262	EJS THOMPSON	Kerikeri	24/2/98

We are unable to guarantee either the completeness or the total accuracy of this list but it has been carefully checked against the records available. Though there has been no death notice in our newspapers, we have included VIC BLUNDELL on the basis of information received; Vic was a financial member of our Branch before he moved to Australia some years ago. Others well-known in Auckland Branch include MAURICE GANE of Auckland and LES JURD, Waiheke Island. One who will be remembered as a stretcher-bearer in A Company was "TAFFY" PHILLIPS of Pipiwai, near Kaiwaka. He held the rank of Staff Sergeant at War's end. We extend our deep sympathy to the widows and families of all former members of the Battalion who have passed away in recent months. Condolences, too, to our long-term Branch Committee member and Welfare Officer, RON JONES, whose wife PHYLLIS JONES passed away in January.

Editor

THE CHALLENGE

(By courtesy of Auckland Branch, 19th Battalion & Armoured Regiment Assn)

Fifty five years ago, mid-October 1943, 4th Armoured Brigade, minus their tanks, were assembled near the port of Alexandria awaiting shipment to an unknown destination. Tanks and drivers were to be shipped from a different point of embarkation. Troop transports were lying out in the stream, lighters on hand to transport the heavily laden Kiwis complete with their 2 gallon water cans from shore to ship.

As often happened, timing was not exactly spot on - 4th Brigade, with troops from other 2 Div units and different transit camps, had been dropped off at the assembly area much too early. Waiting in the confines of a restricted transit zone and in the dust and heat of the Egyptian sun, produced a period of restlessness that led to boredom and mischief for idle hands.

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FROM OLYMPUS TO TRIESTE

**A "potted" history of 22 Battalion as published
in the Daily Post, Rotorua on March 16, 1998**

When New Zealand declared war on NAZI Germany in September, 1939, the Government of the day, led by Prime Minister Michael Joseph Savage, decided to repeat the policy adopted in 1914/1918 by assembling a 2nd NZ Expeditionary Force and sending it, an Echelon at a time, to the war zone. This force would provide, in due course, an Infantry Division of some 20,000 men for front-line service but it would take the fledgling Division at least 12 months to reach full strength, due to the limited numbers that could be mobilised and given basic training at any one time.

The men who became the original members of 22 Battalion (between 800 and 900 in number) came together for the first time at Trentham Military Camp in January, 1940. Their first CO was LT Col L W Andrew, VC, a Regular soldier who had won his decoration as a lance-corporal in World War 1, Col Andrew was a strict disciplinarian who was determined that his (22nd) battalion would be "second to none". The new battalion was part of the Second Echelon, 2 NZEF, soon to become the 5th Infantry Brigade of 2nd NZ Division. After final leave, the Battalion sailed from Wellington on the "Empress of Britain" at the beginning of May, 1940. At the time of sailing, the official intention was that the Second Echelon would join up with the First Echelon in Egypt but the fall of France caused their convoy to be diverted to Britain, via South Africa. In England, 22 Battalion took an active part in the Battle of Britain but, when the threat of invasion was over, the whole 5th Brigade was sent to sea again, arriving in the Middle East in March 1941, just in time to join up with the rest of 2 NZ Division for the campaign in Greece. It was in Greece that the men of 22 Battalion went into action for the first time - in the area of Olympus Pass.

BATTLE HONOURS OF 22 BATTALION

For the next four years, until May, 1945, 22 Battalion was very much involved in the battles that took place in the Middle East and then in Italy, its main battle honours being:- 1941/1942:- Greece; Crete; Libya 1941: Minqar Qaim; Ruweisat Ridge; Alam Halfa; El Alamein. 1943/45:- Sangro River; Orsogna; Cassino; La Romola (Florence); Faenza; Senio River; Trieste. The battalion's casualties in these campaigns totalled just over 1600, made up of:- Killed in action or died of wounds - 304; Wounded - 799 (many were wounded more than once); Prisoners of War - 511. The other Units of the Division suffered similar losses, necessitating a steady flow of reinforcements from New Zealand. Thankfully, the casualty rates were significantly below the levels reached in the 1914/18 war.

DISASTER ON RUWEISAT

22 Battalion suffered its heaviest casualties of the north African campaigns during the desert fighting of July, 1942. The Unit's fortunes reached their lowest ebb at daylight on July 15 when, after a successful night attack that had breached the enemy's lines to a depth of six miles, the battalion was over-run by tanks of Rommel's 15th Panzer Division at Ruweisat Ridge. The support of 8th Army's own tanks, which had been promised for first light, failed to arrive. It was because of this disaster and similar ones that affected four other NZ Battalions in the same period that 2nd NZ Division went into the El Alamein battle of October, 1942 with only two of its three Brigades, 4th Brigade having been sent back to Base Camp to retrain as an Armoured Brigade, so that the Division could have its own tanks under its own command in future. After the Battle of Alamein, 22 Battalion was withdrawn from the pursuit of the defeated Afrika Korps to become 4th Armoured Brigade's Motor Battalion.

From Olympus to Trieste (continued)

KEITH ELLIOTT'S V.C.:- It was on that same morning of July 15, 1942, when the greater part of three companies of the battalion were about to be rounded up by German tanks, that Sgt Keith Elliott, who was in charge of 18 men of 11 Platoon, B Company, saw the approaching enemy tanks in time to take his platoon forward to a less exposed position where they could, for a short while, evade capture. They then had two options:- to surrender to the surrounding enemy or to have a go at getting back to the Alamein line from which they had set out the night before. Needless to add that they chose Option 2, knocking out numerous machine gun posts and capturing about 140 prisoners on the way back. Keith, who became a clergyman after the war, died of cancer in 1989 at the age of 73.

THE ROAD TO TRIESTE

In the interval between the end of the fighting in North Africa and the move to Italy (in October 1943), 22 Battalion underwent a number of changes. It was announced that many of the men who had come overseas in the First, Second and Third Echelons would be going home on furlough and the first draft of these men from the battalion sailed away from Egypt in June, 1943. The unit's numbers were brought back up to full strength from the ranks of recent reinforcements and it then continued the training needed to become 4th Brigade's Motor Battalion. In mid-October, all Units of 2 NZ Division went aboard ship at Alexandria and disembarked at Taranto before moving north in stages to the Sangro River on Italy's East Coast. It was at the Sangro that the NZ Division's Italian campaign really began, the advance from Sangro to Trieste lasting about 18 months and including periods of very heavy fighting against the tenacity and efficiency of the German forces, who took full advantage of Italy's rugged mountain chain and the many rivers that crossed the 8th Army's lines of advance.

The official History of 22 Battalion records that, in Italy, the battalion was under fire for twice as long and suffered more losses in killed and wounded than in all its other campaigns put together. From the Sangro in the east, the battalion moved west to Cassino; then, after the fall of Rome, it was north towards Florence, where 22 Battalion was very much involved in the battle for the hillside village of La Romola. With the fall of Florence in August 1944, two-thirds of Italy had been cleared of the enemy but there was still a great deal of heavy fighting to come on the Adriatic (eastern) coast of Italy, where rivers such as the Senio, the Po and the Adige were formidable barriers, especially when manned by elite German troops.

These obstacles were overcome one by one and, with some breaks out of the line for rest, recreation, training and the replacement of casualties, 22 Battalion and the rest of 2 NZ Division made such fast progress that they were able to spend Christmas, 1944 fairly quietly, 22 Battalion making Faenza its winter base. It was in this period that the battalion ceased to be 4th Armoured Brigade's Motor Battalion and reverted to its former status of an Infantry Unit. After manoeuvres in March, it was springtime (April 1945) when 2 NZ Division began its last and most spectacular attack of the war, advancing 20 miles in a week against bitter opposition. It was this attack that broke the back of the German resistance and, from here on, the Road to Trieste became a race to Trieste. The average speed of the advance increased to almost 10 miles per day and, on May 1, 1945, the advance became almost a triumphal procession. On the following day (May 2), when the German armies in Italy surrendered unconditionally, 22 Battalion had the honour of leading the final advance into the city of Trieste, supported by tanks of 20 NZ Armoured Regiment and the 12th Lancers, a British regiment.

POLITICAL CONFRONTATION

At the same time as the German armies in Italy were surrendering, the New Zealanders in Trieste were being confronted by what looked like a new enemy, the Yugoslav forces of Marshal Tito, who, having liberated his own country from the Germans, was now showing a determination to

From Olympus to Trieste (continued)

extend his conquests far enough to include a major prize (the city of Trieste), even if this meant fighting his former allies. For the NZ soldiers, who had expected that their role would now be an Army of Occupation one, this situation was highly embarrassing. It is greatly to their credit that they controlled themselves so well that this political war did not become a shooting one. After several weeks of extreme tension, the Yugoslavs withdrew from the city when political discussions at the highest level had convinced Tito that Trieste would not be allowed to become part of Yugoslavia - a very wise decision in the light of recent events in that part of the world. In the post-war years, a historian at the University of Otago has carried out considerable research on the New Zealand role in the liberation of Trieste and has shown great interest in a suggestion by a well-known NZ writer that the Trieste crisis was the first clash of the COLD WAR. It may well have been just that but it is doubtful if the Kiwi soldiers who were there in mid-1945 would have had any notion of what was to happen later - in Berlin for example. Instead, they made the most of any opportunities they had to enjoy sporting activities and the tremendous hospitality of the Triestini, who treated them as liberators and honoured guests.

J-FORCE

At the end of June 1945, 22 Battalion and the rest of 2 NZ Division moved back to southern areas of Italy, where they heard the news of the capitulation of Japan in August 1945. As ships became available, many drafts of men were sent home for discharge from the armed forces and it was a much-reorganised 22 Battalion that went to Japan as part of J-Force. It was in Japan that the battalion was disbanded, being the last of all the battalions of 2 NZEF to cease to exist.

The men who had served with 22 Battalion in Greece, Crete, the Middle East, North Africa and Italy and had survived to tell the tale came home fully convinced of the futility of War as a means of settling international disputes and determined to do everything they could to ensure that their descendants could live their lives in peace. More than 50 years later, the 1939/1945 conflict seems likely to continue to be the last of the World Wars. There is hope for the human race yet.

DAVID RUSSELL, GC

David Russell was a Lance-corporal in 22 NZ Battalion when he was taken prisoner during the desert fighting in Egypt in July, 1942. When Italy capitulated the following year, Russell was one of the many who escaped from prisoner of war camps in North Italy. He then spent close on 18 months on the run from the Germans, who hunted down all escapers with great fervour. At all times, David Russell displayed a conspicuous disregard for his own safety, working closely with the Italian partisans and assisting other escaped prisoners to avoid recapture until their repatriation could be organised. The sad irony of his story is that he himself was recaptured on February 25, 1945, just a few short weeks before the war in Italy ended.

Russell's captors demanded that he tell them the names of the Italians who had given him assistance and shelter and, when he refused point blank to give the enemy this information, he was told that he would be put to death unless he was more co-operative. It was three days later, on February 28, that David Russell was shot by a firing squad. Undoubtedly, he saved the lives of the Italians who had been his companions and associates as well as protecting other escapers from recapture and perhaps a fate similar to his own. He has justly been described as a soldier whose courage ranked him alongside the winners of the Victoria Cross and he thoroughly deserved the George Cross that was awarded to him posthumously in 1948. The place where Lance Corporal Russell was executed was the village of Ponte di Piave. He was buried in the civilian cemetery there and the village people erected a rough headstone to commemorate his courage and loyalty. Later, his remains were transferred to the British War Cemetery at Udine, leaving the villagers of Ponte di Piave with a strong wish that a suitable memorial be erected at

From Olympus to Trieste (continued)

the place where Dave Russell was put to death and initially buried. It was not until the 50th anniversary of Russell's death that the half-formed plans of the village people came to fruition, thanks to the assistance given to them by a Kiwi ex-serviceman who had married an Italian girl and had lived in Italy since the war. A memorial plaque was erected just inside the entrance to the cemetery at Ponte di Piave in February 1995. The NZ Ambassador to Italy was present at the ceremony and contributions towards the cost of the plaque were made by the NZ Government, the NZ RSA and the 22nd Battalion Association. The inscription on the plaque (in Italian and English) records 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".

Written by Cedric Randerson

The Challenge **(Continued from page 2)**

It was discovered that adjacent to the assembly area was a "Naafi" storage and distribution point, pallet after pallet stacked high with crates of beer "beautiful beer" tantalisingly close but protected by a 12 foot high wire mesh fence topped with nasty barbed wire. As a further security measure a solitary armed Egyptian guard paraded diligently up and down inside the wire compound, keeping a watchful eye on Kiwis peering speculatively in the direction of those crates.

A number of troops, in a seemingly innocent move, drifted towards the fence, forming a circle that attracted more and more Kiwis until a section of the fence was completely obscured. George the guard, who at first showed only mild interest, became curious, moved closer.

"What was happening on the outside of the compound?" These strange foreign soldiers, standing close together in a circle, talking to each in a language he did not understand, gesturing and exchanging monetary gifts.

A voice called "ten ackers he heads em". Near by answer "Yo're on". Then another voice "five on the side that it's evens". Reply "tails for me". Still another voice, "nah I'm a leg man myself".

George, now really intrigued said to himself, "Ah" this is a coming together of worshippers; they must be a race of believers. A soldier inside the circle raised one hand, the other held a bundle of notes, he surveyed the circle with a critical eye - cried aloud!! "Placed ya bets?" - all set - come in Spinner". Another soldier stepped forward, his right arm extended, hand held flat, palm uppermost on which he held two shining tokens. - He is making an offering thought George. This soldier then tossed the tokens into the air, - the entire group raised their eyes to the sky following the path of the spinning objects, then as in prayer, inclined their head, watching intently as the tokens fell to the sand. - Such reverence!!

George could not believe his eyes, convinced he was witnessing a phenomenon, mysterious and sacred. He was invited to join the service but showed some reluctance to become part of this unusual ritual. The temptation however proved too much, hesitantly, he passed a note through the wire. This offering was rewarded with two notes and surprisingly, with the next toss of the magic tokens he received further rewards. George marvelled at his good fortune, well and truly "hooked".

Meanwhile, back at the fence: Some 30 yards along the line another group of Kiwis were fully occupied in a game with a difference. Out of sight of the totally engrossed guard, the bottom

The Challenge (continued)

of the fence had been lifted to allow the slim form of a Kiwi to slip underneath. Crate after crate of beer was manhandled through to waiting hands and disappeared among the gleeful marauders. The wire, repositioned at ground level, left no visible signs of an unauthorised entry into the compound.

The loss was not immediately discovered, - the troops by then enroute to that unknown destination, Italy. Naafi authorities ordered an investigation, finally tracking down and identifying the culprits. Restitution was demanded and eventually made from Regimental funds; no disciplinary action was taken. Certain 19th Regiment members, while not openly admitting involvement, later expressed disappointment and disgust; it was a bit of a let down; to cap it all, the beer was warm anyhow.

FEBRUARY (Contributed by Doug Froggatt)

Those of you who attended the 1988 National Reunion at Alexandra Park, Auckland, may recall the following extract from one of the addresses at that function.

"I would commence by drawing your attention to the date of this reunion and wonder whether it was by accident or by design, that the Auckland Section selected this month and this day. For it is February - and that word is significant to every member of 22. Furthermore, it is the 28th day of February, and "28 days" too, is of significance. And whether by accident or design, it is certainly a happy choice of month and day.

February!!

What memories that word conjures up. Firstly, there was "Old February" himself. "The Father of the Regiment". Lt. Col. L W Andrew, V.C. Then there was his famous "28 Days":- hence his fond and honoured nickname.

But I am sure you would know too, that it was during the month of February (3/2/42 in fact) that the Battalion paraded for Colonel Andrew for the last time. For on that day he took his farewell on relinquishing command of the 22nd. So February has a very real place in the records of this Battalion. But it does not stop there, for here is a singular fact.

Take up sometime your copy of the Official history of the 22nd Battalion and turn to the rear pages. There you will find listed, the names of 282 members of the Battalion who were either killed in Action or died of Wounds received in action. The dates of their deaths are also shown. They were killed, or they died, in the various areas where 22 gave battle. They were killed or they died in every month of the year EXCEPT - Yes! - except the month of February. Not a single member of the 22nd Battalion was either Killed in Action or died of his wounds during the month of February through the entire war years." Believe it!

This is now in need of amendment. The Television item about David Russell of the 22nd Battalion would have been seen by many, David Russell was posthumously awarded the George Cross in recognition of gallant and distinguished services whilst a prisoner of war in German hands.

With others he had escaped from P.O.W. camps and was living amongst the Italians in Northern Italy. He was recaptured, tortured, beaten and threatened with death but steadfastly refused to disclose the hiding places of other escaped P.O.W.s or the names of the Italian civilians who had been sheltering them.

He was taken from the Prison and placed before a German Firing Squad. Defiant to the last, David Russell gallantly went to his death that day in 1945.

And the Day? The 28th February. Believe it!!

WHEN DOES IT END?

For some months now all sorts of people have been telling us that a new Millennium will begin on the first day of the year 2000. This would also mean, of course, that the current millennium would end on the last day of 1999. The reasoning on which these assumptions are based is quite fallacious. The present (20th) century and the associated millennium will not come to an end until December 31, 2000 and the new century and millennium will have their beginnings on January 1, 2001. One wonders if our country and, perhaps, the world at large will have two sets of millennium celebrations, the first of which (in January, 2000) will be a year early. While we don't need to lose any sleep over this, the confusion as to just when the millennium ends seems a little unfortunate.

Editor

FROM THE TREASURER

A preliminary look at our Income & Expenditure figures for the year ended February, 1999 indicates that this year's financial statement should show a small surplus, but this is only because of the receipt of non-recurring windfalls in both 1997 and 1998. Without these extra funds coming in, we'd be well in the red by now. The recent downward trend in our normal income, as well as in the supply of our members reminiscences has again made me wonder if our Newsletters can continue much longer in their present format and 8-page length. That will be discussed at this month's AGM but, in the meantime, we have begun a new financial year and will shortly be billed for the cost of printing and distributing this issue of the Newsletter. Your Branch Committee's thanks go out to all those who respond (many very generously) to our requests for subscriptions and donations. As you know, we haven't sent out sub accounts since about 1986, leaving it to our Branch members and others on our mailing list to contribute according to their means. The official sub is still \$5 p.a. but it needs to be at least twice that much.

Cedric Randerson
Hon Treasurer

March, 1999

22nd Battalion Association
Box 26-314
AUCKLAND 1003

Branch Social Function - Sunday, 21st March, 1999

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

- | | | |
|-----|---|----------|
| (1) | Entrance fee for _____ people at \$15.00 per head | \$ _____ |
| | <u>AND/OR</u> | |
| (2) | My 1999/2000 Subscription/Donation | \$ _____ |
| | <u>Total</u> | \$ _____ |

Name & Address (Block Letters):-

Army No: