

"Vrai et Fort"

22nd Battalion Association

AUCKLAND BRANCH

Telephone 523 1310
Secretary :
C. W. Randerson

BRANCH NEWSLETTER

PO Box 26 314
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APRIL, 2000

BRANCH NEWSLETTER

BRANCH SOCIAL FUNCTION – SUNDAY, APRIL 30, 2000

As we informed the readers of these Newsletters in the December, 1999 issue, the date of this year's Annual Branch get-together was deferred until late April, 2000 to avoid it being too close to the holding of the big Reunion in Hastings at the end of February. The Hastings 2000 "do" was well attended and much enjoyed by those who were able to be there but none of the Association's Branches felt able to accept a **national** commitment for the year 2002, so that Branch Delegates could only decide that no further **national** Reunions could be held. This decision had become almost inevitable and was fully expected by many of us. From here on, we will have to do what other WW2 Unit Associations already do – that is hold functions on a Branch or Regional basis only.

The cessation of National Reunions has given our Branch function scheduled for April 30, 2000 additional importance. As usual, we expect to have people from north and south of Auckland present, as well as those from the city itself. Though our Rules require us to hold a short AGM during this function, the programme will be kept as informal as possible. Also as usual, we **DO** need to hear from you **whether or not** you are able to come. **PLEASE** use the Reply Slip (back page) to send us your **pre-payment by mail** – this gives us the numbers the caterer must have and is a big help to 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 2000/2001 financial year and any further donation 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 & 1pm
Close down: 3 pm

VISITORS:

Your friends and relations will, as always, be most welcome.

THE COST:

\$15 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, 26/4/2000**.

ROLL OF HONOUR

30755	P A BRADY	Plimmerton	25/2/2000
428464	O R (OWEN) BULLOT	Auckland	24/2/2000
30766	L A O BURNS	Levin	20/7/99
44256	A G CAMPBELL	Lower Hutt	1/8/99
634669	L D G CLARK	Auckland	13/12/99
6883	N M COWLING	New Plymouth	2/12/99
489587	D F GILBERD	Wanganui	17/6/99
40686	W E GEORGE	Christchurch	1/9/99
428206	R F GOSNEY	Levin	6/2/2000
249097	J HERBERT	Whangarei	17/10/99
614850	W H KINSEY	Wellington	30/12/99
48998	O T LEWIS	Wanganui	26/6/99
617215	J S POWELL	Levin	29/12/99
6852	P (PHIL) RETSON	Hastings	5/1/2000
656866	C T ROSE	Auckland	18/5/99
41109	P C WILSON	Palmerston North	27/11/99

Yet again, a lengthy ROLL OF HONOUR or LAST POST list that could have been made quite a bit longer. Of those listed above, **OWEN BULLOT** was prominent in the affairs of Wanganui Branch for quite some time but he and his wife moved to Auckland a year or so ago. Owen was on our mailing list but we had no personal contact with him until his wife advised us just a few weeks ago that he was terminally ill (cancer).

PHIL RETSON was a stalwart of Hawkes Bay Branch for a long period of years and was the Branch Treasurer there until he had a heart attack about six months ago and had to enter a Rest Home.

Branch President **GEORGE MATTHEWS** and the other members of the Auckland Branch Committee extend their deep sympathy to the wives and families of all the former members of the Battalion who have passed away in recent months. We will remember them.

FULL LAST POST LISTS AVAILABLE

For at least the past two years, **JOHN BOWKER**, the Keeper of the National Roll, has been sending to all Branches of our association a full alphabetical listing of his **LAST POST** notices for the previous year. His full list for 1999 contained just over 70 names, about a dozen more than for 1998. His lists always seem to include names that are not on the National Roll, presumably because the men concerned had had no contact with the Battalion Association. Shortage of space limits the size of the lists that are published in our Newsletters but, if anyone would like to see the full **LAST POST** list for 1998 and 1999, photo-copies can be made available on request and the receipt of a stamped, addressed envelope.

Editor

SHOT FOR DESERTING

If you subscribe to the New Zealand Listener, you will know that this publication contains, as well as detailed information and commentaries on forthcoming TV and Radio programmes, many articles on topics of general interest. The Listener's issue dated April 1, 2000 included an article that is especially interesting to returned servicemen. It deals with the short life and tragic death of Private VICTOR SPENCER, the last New Zealand soldier to be sentenced to death and shot by his own army.

Victor Spencer was only 18 years of age when he lied about his actual age in 1915 in order to sign up for World War 1. He was only 21 when he was shot by a New Zealand firing party on February 24, 1918. His story has been brought back to light by Invercargill Labour MP MARK PECK's campaign to obtain a full pardon for each of the five New Zealanders executed for desertion or mutiny during World War 1.

Last year, Parliament rejected Peck's Private Member's Bill and retired High Court Judge EDWARD SOMERS recommended that a statement be read out in Parliament as an official recognition that the five executed New Zealanders were themselves victims of war. But Peck says that such a statement would not go far enough and that he plans to continue to push for a full pardon for each of the five men. "I'm optimistic that Parliament will finally do the decent thing".

Victor Spencer first deserted after being admitted to hospital with Shell-Shock from a German trench mortar attack. Found guilty, he was imprisoned for nine months and he then returned to his Unit to find that all of his close mates had been killed in action or had died from other causes. He disappeared again in August, 1917 while his battalion was supplying frontline troops. He was discovered and arrested four and a half months later living with a French woman. In his defence against that second charge of desertion, Spencer cited shell-shock and alcohol as contributing factors but not even his good record at Gallipoli was able to save him from execution. A film-maker named MARK WINTER, who wants to direct a feature film about Spencer, says that Victor's story demands to be told. "Spencer was no coward; he was a brave soldier. His company officers spoke highly of him. He fought well at Gallipoli and he never left his mates in the trenches. It was when they were sitting around that he bugged off".

Members of the Spencer family say that young Victor's execution was never talked about by his relatives in the Invercargill area, being regarded as a family disgrace. And, later on, it "tended to be forgotten. Unless someone else brought it up, it was never mentioned". The present film project has family support and would, I am certain be well received by New Zealanders who have fought in other wars".

DESERTION IN WW2: Looking at the Victor Spencer story from a World War 2 point of view, I feel that I speak for the vast majority of the men who were involved in the fighting in Greece, Crete, North Africa and Italy when I say that the execution of any soldier for desertion or mutiny was never justified and that we can be grateful that no such punishment took place in WW2. Back in 1996, I wrote an article for the Auckland Branch Newsletter under the title of "COURAGEOUSLY FEARFUL". I make no apology for repeating here one paragraph of that article that has relevance to this review of Victor Spencer's story. The paragraph in question referred to the fact that every Infantry Unit included a small group of men who should not have been posted to a line battalion in the first place or should have been returned to Base camp as soon as their shortcomings became apparent. "In this category were those who made a habit of Going AWOL on the eve of battle and those who were liable to "do a runner" when the going got tough. This group would also include the very small number of soldiers who were afflicted by what used to be called Anxiety Neurosis, probably as a result of a previous encounter with heavy bombing or shelling, and were likely to go to pieces when the shooting started. These men included a few officers and NCOs as well as other ranks. After the first World War, we heard a lot

SHOT FOR DESERTING (Continued)

about the men who were court-martialled for desertion and could be shot if found guilty but, in the more enlightened days of WW2, the penalties for desertion were considerably less drastic".

It is not difficult to recall cases of men who were charged, or could have been charged, with desertion of the kind that, in WW1 would have caused them to be court-martialled and possibly executed. In the platoon in which for a time in Italy, I held the rank of Platoon Sergeant, we had a very young soldier whom I will call JIM (not his name). On more than one occasion Jim disappeared on the eve of the platoon going into battle and we discovered later that he had acquired a girlfriend in a nearby Italian village. He would probably have been charged with going AWOL but I cannot remember what the outcome was. Jim, was a very likeable lad and I found it impossible to become angry with him.

During the desert campaigns, I remember several instances of men who went to pieces when under fire and "did a runner". On one of those occasions, my company was moving forward to relieve another unit when four men passed us going in the opposite direction. Don't know what happened to them but they were coming out of battle much faster than they would have gone in. Then there was the time (in June 1942) when the 8th Army was being driven out of Libya by Rommels Panzers and 2nd NZ Division was brought back from Syria to help stem the tide. As our convoy headed along the Desert Road towards the Libyan border, we were staggered at the number of 8th Army vehicles that were heading the other way, towards the Nile Delta. To say that we found this disconcerting would be the under-statement of the century. The 8th Army was at that time a defeated rabble, fleeing back into Egypt at maximum speed.

General AUICHLBCK had taken over command of the beaten 8th Army and had ordered a delaying action to cover the retreat to Alamein. This was at MINQAR QAIM, south of MERSA MATRUH, and 2 NZ Division was allotted a major role in trying to save 8th Army from extinction. General Freyberg and his senior officers could see that the Division could very easily be bypassed and cut off by Rommel's tanks, with a grave danger that complete Units would finish up in the bag. To avoid this disastrous possibility, each Unit was told to send an LOB party back to Base, this to provide at least a nucleus of men in every Unit on which to rebuild in case of need. In 22 Battalion, the LOB party consisted of A Company plus representatives of each of the other companies. As we headed back to Base Camp, some German fighter-planes strafed our convoy. The trucks stopped abruptly and we all hit the ground a reasonable distance from our vehicles. When the German planes departed, we resumed our journey but the truck I was in was short of two men who, when last seen, were running flat out in the general direction of the Mediterranean Sea. We didn't see them again and they probably became POWs.

About a year later, when the war in North Africa was over, it was announced that the 1st Furlough Draft, comprising most of the men of the first, second and third Echelons who were still around, would shortly return to NZ on leave. As everyone knows, many of the lucky ones declined to rejoin the Division in Italy when their furlough period ended. In Army language, the non-returners could have been classed as AWOL, or even as deserters, but there were probably too many of them for the authorities to mete out any drastic treatment. Our Battalion History is silent as to what happened to them and we heard conflicting stories from those who did return overseas but the general feeling was that they should have been given the option of rejoining the Division or staying in NZ.

To sum up, I feel very strongly that, while desertion was an offence under Army law and a threat to discipline that had to be punished, those five men who were executed during WW1 did **NOT** deserve to be shot, especially by their own comrades in arms. Whenever I feel inclined to criticise the shortcomings that I see in my fellow men, I remind myself of the wisdom of that priceless old adage:- There but for the grace of God go I.

Cedric Randerson

THE LAST OF THE NATIONALS

As the editor was unable to be there himself, this report is at best second-hand or third-hand only but will give the substance of how things went at the **HASTINGS 2000 NATIONAL REUNION** on February 26/27, 2000. Firstly, attendance estimates varied between 320 and 350, the higher figure no doubt referring to the Sunday luncheon, which attracts more people than does the Saturday programme. A maximum turn-out of 350 was a very good muster indeed, exceeding the Sunday luncheon total of about 300 in Rotorua in 1998, and probably included close on 200 former members of 22 Battalion, supplemented by the presence of wives, widows and others. Secondly, the weather was of the kind for which Hawkes Bay is famous and anyone who has been in Hastings at that time of year is familiar with the blazing heat that can be experienced. This leads me to the one criticism of the Reunion that I have heard. In the words of my correspondent:- "We arrived at about 10.45 am on the Saturday to join a long registration queue in the hot Hastings sun. Neither the queue nor the sun moved very quickly and we were handed lunch tickets at about 12.15 pm to go and eat and then return to complete our registrations". But my correspondent then goes on to say:- "From then on, everything appeared to work very well. The catering on Saturday night and Sunday dinner was superb". His summing up was that, socially, it was a good reunion that he and his wife enjoyed.

MEETING OF DELEGATES: This meeting took place on the Sunday morning and it was formally announced by National President **ALF GEORGE** that this was the last National Reunion, no Branch being prepared to host another. He moved that the officers of Hawkes Bay Branch continue to be the National Executive of the Association.

This was the most important business that the delegates had before them and the main decisions made have already been the subject of a report sent to all Branches by **JOHN BOWKER**, Keeper of the Roll. Here is John's report:-

As this was the **FINAL NATIONAL REUNION**, it meant that there would be no automatically appointed National Officers to take over after the Hastings Reunion – thus leaving the ASSOCIATION without a "Head". This may not have been legally acceptable for an Incorporated Body to so act. To overcome the situation, it was moved, seconded and agreed to by all the delegates that "the current Reunion President **ALF GEORGE**, to continue on as the NATIONAL PRESIDENT; and the Hawkes Bay Secretary **DES SHERNING** to also act as the NATIONAL SECRETARY". **AUSTIN RIDDELL** is standing down as NATIONAL TREASURER (but remains in charge of bursary affairs) while **BRIAN BROOKER** (the Reunion Secretary) becomes the NATIONAL TREASURER. This has the advantage of all three National Officers being close together and thus able to attend any need without undue delay. It also ensures that the Branches still have access to National Representatives. Any amendments needed to our Constitution will be considered and attended to in due course.

John Bowker

By way of general comment, it seems to me that the decisions of the Branch Delegates were fully in accordance with the Association's Rules. There is probably nothing to stop any Branch from applying for permission to hold a further National Reunion but such a happening seems highly unlikely.

It was good to hear that **AUS RIDDELL** would continue to act as the Association's Liaison man with Guardian Trust in dealing with the affairs of the 22 Battalion LWA Bursary at Horowhenua College and that, also, the Delegates approved the proposal to transfer the surplus from the Waiouru Memorial Window fund to the Bursary Trust. We were informed by **DES SHERNING** last November that his Branch had given the College a framed photo of the Memorial Window to be hung adjacent to the Bursary Honours Board.

Editor

JUST A COMMON SOLDIER

(With acknowledgement to the Newsletter of the Papatoetoe RSA)

He was getting old and paunchy, and his hair was falling fast,
And he sat around the RSA, telling stories of the past,
Of a war that he had fought in, and the deeds that he had done,
In his exploits with his comrades, they were heroes, every one.

Though sometimes to his neighbours, his tales became a joke,
All his RSA buddies listened, for they knew whereof he spoke.
But we'll hear his tales no longer, for old Bill has passed away,
And the Worlds a little poorer – for a Soldier died today.

He'll not be mourned by many, just his children and his wife,
For he lived an ordinary, quiet and uneventful life,
Held a job and raised a family, quietly going on his way,
And the World won't note his passing, though a Soldier died today.

When Politicians leave this Earth, their bodies lie in state,
While thousands note their passing, and proclaim that they were great
Papers tell their life stories from the time that they were young,
But the passing of a Soldier goes unnoticed and unsung.

Is the greatest contribution to the welfare of our land
A guy who breaks his promises and cons his fellow man?
Or the ordinary fellow who in times of war and strife
Goes off to serve his country and offers up his life.

A politicians stipend and the style in which he lives
Are sometimes disproportionate to the service that he gives
While the ordinary Soldier who offers up his all
Is paid off with a medal, and perhaps a pension, small.

It's so easy to forget them, for it was so long ago
That the "Old Bills" of our Country went to battle, but we know
It was not the politicians, with their compromise and ploys,
Who won for us the Freedom that our country now enjoys.

Should you find yourself in danger with your enemies at hand,
Would you want a politician with his ever shifting stand?
Or would you prefer a Soldier who has sworn to defend
His home, his kin and country, and would fight until the end?

He was just a common Soldier and his ranks are growing thin,
But his presence should remind us we may need his like again,
For when countries are in conflict then we find the Soldier's part
Is to clean up all the troubles that the politicians start.

If we cannot do him honour while he's here to hear the praise,
Then at least lets give him homage at the ending of his days,
Perhaps a simple headline in a paper that would say:
"Our Country is in mourning – for a Soldier died today".

22ND BATTALION ASSOCIATION AUCKLAND BRANCH**BRANCH COMMITTEE – YEAR ENDING 29/2/2000**

<u>PATRON:</u>	D R FROGGATT	28 Freyberg Street, Tauranga
<u>PRESIDENT:</u>	H G MATTHEWS	2 Cron Avenue, Te Atatu South, Auckland 8
<u>VICE-PRESIDENTS:</u>	J ALLEN J G McMILLAN	1 Mayville Avenue, New Lynn 8C Seddon Street, Rotorua
<u>SECRETARY</u>	C W RANDERSON	PO Box 26-314, Epsom, Auckland
<u>TREASURER:</u>		
<u>WELFARE OFFICER:</u>	R G JONES	3/10 Mahon Place, Papatoetoe
<u>COMMITTEE:</u>	G HUDSON M I KNIGHT H B McRAE S R (STU) SOUTHALL	3/89 Centreway Road, Orewa 24 Carisbrook Street, Katikati West 34 Gifford Road, Papatoetoe 29 Francis Drive, Katikati

DAVID RUSSELL, GC, ITALY STAR

ARCH SCOTT of Grey Lynn was a very close associate of Lance Corporal **DAVID RUSSELL** for some time in northern Italy when both men were on the run from the German Army. That association ended when Russell was recaptured in 1945 and shot by the Germans for refusing to reveal the whereabouts of other escaped prisoners of war or the identity of the Italian partisans who befriended them. Last year, Scott heard that the Russell family had presented his friend's George Cross to the Army Memorial Museum and this prompted him to redouble a previously unsuccessful bid for the Italy Star to be awarded to David Russell to go with his posthumously awarded George Cross. Initially, the Defence Force deemed Russell ineligible for the Italy Campaign Star but Scott, who was himself awarded the Italy Star despite also being captured in Africa, made further representations, including the sending of an excerpt from **DARK OF THE MOON**, the book he published in 1985 and of which a full chapter had been devoted to Russell's exploits. At this point, the Defence Force decided that a 1948 change in Army Orders allowed for special circumstances awards of campaign stars for outstanding conduct by prisoners of war or escapers and Scott was astonished to receive Russell's medal by return post. He promptly sent it on to the Army Museum.

The Museum's Registrar thanked Scott for his letter accompanying the Italy Star awarded to David Russell. "We have now remounted the medals and the Italy Star is displayed with the complete group in our Valour Alcove. Thank you for your effort in having this medal awarded".

"AND WHEN YOU PRAY....."

IN THE INTERESTS of political correctness, and no doubt with tongue firmly in cheek, the Reverend **Kenneth Scott**, of Ontario, has devised this version of ***The Lord's Prayer***.

Our universal chairperson in outer space, your identity enjoys the highest rating on a prioritised selectivity scale. May your sphere of influence take on reality parameters, may your mindset be implemented on this planet as in outer space.

Allot to us, at this point in time and on a per diem basis, a sufficient and balanced dietary food intake, and rationalise a disclaimer against the negative feedback of others.

And deprogramme our negative potentialities, but desensitise the impact of counter-productive force. For yours is the dominant sphere of influence, the ultimate capability, and the highest qualitative analysis rating at this point in time, and extending beyond a limited time-frame. End of message.

THE TREASURER REPORTS

Though the December, 1999 edition of these Newsletters could not be sent out much before Christmas and was criticised by one recipient as being "not up to usual standard", there was quite a good response to the funding request we made in that issue and the Branch Accounts for the year ended February, 2000 should again show a modest surplus. Our GENERAL FUNDS are sufficient to keep the wolf from the door for a brief period **but** we are now in a new financial year and we will shortly be billed for the cost of printing and mailing this issue. As you know, we stopped sending out sub-accounts well over a decade ago, leaving it to Branch members and others on our mailing list to contribute according to their means and as the spirit moves them. Thanks to the many who send us donations well in excess of the basic sub of \$5 p.a., our Branch has made it through to the year 2000.

Cedric Randerson, Hon Treasurer

April, 1999

22nd Battalion Association
Box 26-314
AUCKLAND 1003

Branch Social Function - Sunday, April 30, 2000

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

- | | | |
|-----|---|----------|
| (1) | Entrance fee for _____ people at \$15.00 per head | \$ _____ |
| | <u>AND/OR:</u> | |
| (2) | My 2000/2001 Subscription/Donation | \$ _____ |
| | <u>Total</u> | \$ _____ |

Name & Address (Block Letters):- _____

Army No: _____

PROMPT REPLIES PLEASE