

2/1 FIELD REGIMENT CLUB

KIBBLES POST

APRIL 2008

President

R Olsson
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ST IVES NSW 2075
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Secretary

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VALE

NQM Jones	K Maxwell	W Brine
W Roden	AJ Saunders	J Seidman
NB Byrne	IW Johnston	RJ Gilbert
R Hudson	J Bartlett	C Lind
EA Kennedy		

Received from the Hon Secretary, John Hynes:

More names. More memories. More young faces and events so long back now they could be described as “history”.

Norrie Jones

Always known in the regiment as “Pud” or “Pudden”. Nothing to do with his size or appearance. Rather, as explained by Ken Kell later in this issue, a tribute to Norrie’s ability to quote or argue on any subject known to mankind. Rather like Norman Lindsay’s “Magic Pudding” the more you consumed the more remained.

“Pud” was the quintessential 1st Battery Man, where 1st Battery went there went N.Q.M Jones. The desert saw him, Greece saw him Ceylon saw him and New Guinea certainly saw and heard him.

A signaller manning O.P’s or laying line he, as with most signallers, saw war at the pointy end. Serving alongside and always admiring our well beloved infantry.

A first class soldier whose voice will continue to be heard whenever a Gunner meets another Gunner.

A valiant spirit who is sorely missed.

Keith Maxwell

Keith Maxwell, an original who was an efficient, cool and courageous Gun-Sergeant of the same caliber as all or perhaps, most of our Gun-Sergeants.

Known as “Slapsy” Keith was on occasions somewhat different. When not running a gun-crew he, on the side ran a small “S.P. Book”. On early morning roll-calls could be heard “Gunner – you owe me 2/6d” or “Gunner – I’m into you for a deener” and so on until all had answered “present” interspersed with “see you after the parade”.

On one typically dark New Guinea night Keith left one memorable quote. The Regiment was firing harassing fire at 10 minute intervals. No. 4 gun of F troop was not scheduled to shoot till later, so the troop gun position was quiet as the grave, suddenly No. 4 gun fired. The G.P.O. shouted “Sarn.. Maxwell why did you fire?” Back through the still dark New Guinea night came “Slapsy’s” dulcet tones “Nobody didn’t tell me not to”.

Obviously the good Sergeant Maxwell had become bored and decided to liven up the party. Apart from the grammatical error the incident seems to have been “Regimentally” ignored.

A character in his own right, a courageous, efficient Gunner who now joins the ranks of those to be remembered.

Walter Roden

Walter Roden known sometimes as “Wal” but more frequently in the Regiment known as “Phil”.

This had its origins in the pre-war Sydney villain well known to the press and the police as “Phil the Jew”.

Our “Phil”, a good natured man, took the sobriquet in good stead and he was thus called from 1939 to 1945 and many years afterwards.

Some year’s ago he was admitted to the Montefiore Home at Hunter’s Hill from whence he “marched out”.

His wife rang me to advise his change of address. Referring to him as “Wal” I was confused for the moment saying I only knew a “Phil” Roden – she burst into laughter, clearly knowing the story. I apologized profusely but she thought it hilarious.

“Phil” like others of his faith observed the Jewish holidays in Palestine – they mounted the guard and did other duties on Christmas Day. However, it was observed nevertheless that on the rare occasions ham and/or bacon were on the mess tables dietary restrictions were not observed.

“Phil” served from “go” to “whoa” as a cool, efficient Gunner and was a keen attendee on Anzac Day Re-unions. We miss him

Eric Kennedy

Eric Ambrose Kennedy was only known in the regiment as “Dick” and the “Wacabocabull”.

Why so? I don’t know nor did anyone in or out of the Regiment.

He joined the Regiment in the Middle East, was one of the parties that worked on gun pits in Syria (“Baalbeck”), served in Ceylon and the two New Guinea shows.

A gun-number, driver, part-time “Infanteer”. He was a big man (in every sense of the term), boisterous, good natured and dependable in a crisis.

He was a strong man whose last civilian years were marked by a sad decline. I spoke with him in the last days and he still had his infectious laugh (no longer booming) and his sense of humour.

Before joining the Regiment he and Geoff Ferguson in 1940 went to an “Acks” course at Warwick Farm . The Camp Commandant was a Militia Lieutenant who in civil life was a barber (nowadays we’d call him a “hairdresser”). Kennedy and Ferguson went A.W.L. and were charged. In the orderly room the Barber/Commandant asked “Gunner Kennedy how do you plead?” Kennedy, standing stiffly at attention, eyes fixed, boomed out “short, back and sides, SIR”.

Kennedy got 14 days C.B., Ferguson who wanted to plead differently was crestfallen to also receive 14 days C.B.

Tom Hanson once said to Dick “Kennedy, you are possibly a leader of men but you are leading them the wrong way”.

An unforgettable character, Dick is sadly missed by those with whom he served in those dark but memorable days.

Hon. Secretary’s Note:

There are other names listed but without comment, due to space restrictions.

We would appreciate any comment from those who knew them.

ANZAC DAY 2007

For the first time in over 60 years we had a mixed re-union Luncheon. Members' wives, widows and other female relatives/friends attended.

A memorable day – the female touch added those little elements of grace, charm and memories of other years long since gone for we mere males.

Following the Annual General Meeting the following were elected:-

President

Rex Olsson

Vice-President

Alec Moroney

Hon. Secretary

John Hynes

Hon. Treasurer

Ossie Pearce

Committee

Gordon Craig

George Horwood

Ron Hartmann

Donations July 06 – December 07

R Ausburn

M Lardelli

G Ballantine

Mrs E Miles

Mrs B Black

A Maroney

D Blair

Miss A Monten

Mrs E Brown

B Cruickshank

A Noble

N Day

“Tony” Pazzi

O Pearce

Mrs R Elliott

H Oldenburgh

Mrs L Fuller

G Fricke

A Reed

N Fricke

A Smith

J Hynes

D Shepherd

F Hodgson

Mrs P Salter

E Horwood

G Stanley

Mrs A Hammond

J Stanley

Mrs B Hanson

J Stewart

T Harland

O Stuckle

A Summerside

EA Kennedy

Mrs B Kennedy

A Wade

K Kell

Mrs J Wallach

E Wood

Statement of Income and Expenditure
2/1st Field Regt. Club Association
Year ended 30th June 2007

<u>Year 2006</u>	<u>Income</u>	<u>Year 2007</u>
2285.00	Donations	1873.00
37.60	Bank Interest	45.93
<u>1590.00</u>	Anzac Day Ticket Sales	<u>2897.00</u>
3912.60		4815.93
	<u>Expenditure</u>	
*323.80	Newsletter	115.00
20.00	6 th Division Fee	20.00
200.00	Donations: Sydney Boys High	200.00
58.00	Wreath	-
100.00	Legacy	-
<u>2475.00</u>	Anzac Day	<u>2897.00</u>
3177.00		3232.00

***Newsletter Expenses includes \$258.50 Repairs to Photocopier. Nett Letter \$65.30.**

Anzac Day

<u>Year 2006</u>		<u>Year 2007</u>
1770.00	Catering	2002.65
605.20	Liquor	794.35
<u>100.00</u>	Gratuities Staff	<u>100.00</u>
<u>2475.00</u>		<u>2897.00</u>

Cash Book Summary

Balance (2006)	7777.25
Plus: Income	<u>4815.93</u>
	12593.18
Less: Expenditure	<u>3232.00</u>
Credit	<u>\$9361.18</u> as at 2/7/2007

Bank Statement as at 2/7/2007

Cr. \$9361.18

Ossie Pearce
Hon. Treasurer

From Hon. Secretary:

ANZAC DAY 2008

The Luncheon will be held at the same location as last year i.e. The Marque Hotel (formerly Country Comfort Hotel) at Railway Square (cnr George and Quay Streets) from 11.00 am to 4.00 pm.

After the success of the mixed Luncheon last year, the Committee warmly welcomes female relatives and friends.

Charges will be \$30.00 per head for members and all other visitors, male or female, \$45.00 per head.

As to the March, enclosed is a copy of an advice from the Chief Marshal of the March.

The contents are self-explanatory but highlight the matters raised by me in “Kibble’s Post” of April 2007.

I asked for comments from members and/or relatives in respect of the matters canvassed i.e. future of the Club (Association) and the Anzac Day March.

I received one comment only from Bob Hudson and must assume that our readers simply prefer the Executive Committee to decide when and how to “pull the plug”.

We have had no direct advice from the Chief Marshal but on the basis of the enclosed it would appear that members of units are the only ones to March under their respective banners apart from “carers” etc.

We appreciate the hurt this will occasion members’ relatives who have become accustomed to marching with us.

However, time has caught up with us all and we may well be lucky to have ten members literally marching.

We are prepared in the circumstances to allow non-members to march with us this year all dependent on the March Marshal’s attitude on the day.

Assemble as usual Cnr. King and Castlereagh Streets 9.00 am to 9.30 am – hopefully for this year at least “all will be well”.

“Reveille” January/February 2008

An important letter about the 2008 March

I am aware that some veterans are concerned that changes are planned for the Sydney ANZAC Day March, but I suggest that these concerns are largely based on misinformation and I would like to correct this.

The March Executive Committee believes that it is important that the March recognise the WWII veterans with a position of honour as they begin to pass from the scene. Eventually they will be honoured in the same way as the Boer War and WWI veterans and be represented by a WWII Memorial Horse.

To achieve this in the 2008 Sydney March, WWII veterans, in the order Navy/Army/Air Force, will be invited to march immediately behind the WWI memorial banners and standards and the New Zealand contingent and ahead of other veterans. The normal assembly areas for these veterans have not been changed significantly and associations affected have been advised of the new arrangements. The WWII veterans will be identified by their service with an RSL-supplied banner, and association banners may also be carried.

The committee also understands that generally veterans do not want descendants to march with them, because of their rapidly increasing numbers, which are beginning to demean the significance

of the march. Accordingly the RSL State Council has agreed that in future descendants will participate at the rear of the march.

The Descendants of WWI Veterans Association has established a very successful precedent for this and the association has marched at the rear of the march for some years. A new association for Descendants of WWII and Post WWII Veterans has been formed and will organise participation by other descendants of veterans.

There are some WWII veterans who will want to march with a service association, which consists of veterans who have served in post WWII conflicts. These veterans can of course march in the Post WWII section of the march. But veterans of post WWII conflicts only cannot march with WWII veterans.

Banner carriers and carers of any age will be welcome in any section of the march.

Aged or infirm veterans who have a strong desire to march but who may not be able to keep up with the normal pace of the march should take a position in the flanks/rear of their formation and fall out and proceed independently when they cannot keep up. Exit gates through the barriers, first aid stations and golf cart transport to taxis/public transport will be provided in King Street for those who are forced to leave the march early.

Ian Callaway, Chief Marshal

From Hon. Secretary, John Hynes:

We now have a new President in the form of Rex Olsson, our former long time Auditor (who I always claimed was over-qualified for that post).

Rex joined the Regiment in July 1944 as Troop Commander of B Troop 1st Battery. During the Aitape-Wewak campaign he was mentioned in dispatches for his courage and skill during the attacks on Wewak Point and Wirui Mission.

Rex's military and civil careers have been of a high order, so much so that the Executive considered our readers should be given a short synopsis of those careers. It appears below:

The Regiment's New President

Rex served as a citizen soldier prior to World War II. Following the declaration of war he was called up for full time duty deferring his studies at Sydney University. Commissioned in April 1940 he became an instructor in the School of Artillery and later in the Eastern Command School. In October 1940 he was promoted to Captain and appointed Battery Commander in the 19th Field Regiment RAA. Among his early assignments was to support the infantry in the preparation of defensive positions along the coast from Newcastle to Wollongong. In 1942 he was ordered by Second Australian Army to carry out experiments in the waterproofing of 25 pounder guns and associated equipment to be used in amphibious operations, and to develop procedures for firing the guns from LCVP's, LCM's and LST's. The 19th Battery, under his command assisted the Artillery units of the American First Cavalry and 41st Divisions in their training for amphibious landings.

In July 1944 Rex was posted to the 2/1st Australian Field Regiment where he was appointed B Troop Commander 1st Battery and served in New Guinea. During the Aitape-Wewak campaign he was a FOO in support of the 1st, 2nd and 3rd Battalions of 16 Brigade and the 4th, 8th and 11th Battalions of the 196th Brigade.

After the war, in addition to resuming his University studies, he found time to continue soldiering on in the Citizen Military Forces, being promoted Major in 1946, and was appointed Battery Commander in the 5th Field Regiment. In 1958 he joined his brother as Certified Public Accountants in Canberra, during which time he learned computer programming using binary language, and was one of the first users of a computer in an accounting practice. In 1968 he was invited to return to academic life and was appointed Head of Department and Professor of Finance at the University of New South Wales, the first such appointment in any Australian University. On his retirement he had conferred upon him the title of Emeritus Professor.

Rex holds the degrees of BEc, MBA and PhD, and is a Hon. FCPA and Hon FAIM. He was mentioned in dispatches in New Guinea in 1945 and was appointed a Member in the General Division of the Order of Australia on the 26th January 1990 for services to education, particularly in the area of Finance and Accounting.

From President, Rex Olsson:

Congratulations John Hynes, OAM

Congratulations are extended to our Secretary, John Hynes, who was awarded a Medal in the General Division of the Order of Australia on the 26th June, 2007 for Service to Veterans through the 2/1st Field Regiment Association:.

2/1st Australian Field Regiment Association was formed to maintain communication with past members and to provide comfort and support to them and their families where needed. John, an original member of the Committee since its inception, was elected Secretary in 1961 and has held that position continuously ever since. His leadership and attention to detail has endeared him to the members and their families, and has done much, not only to perpetuate pride in the Regiment, but to extend encouragement and support to assist them to overcome problems inevitably associated with ageing and ill health.

I'm sure that I speak on behalf of the members and their family and friends of the 2/1st Australian Field Regiment Association when I say "Congratulations John recognition of your service over such a long period is truly justified".

Rex Olsson, President

MAILBAG

Letter from Ken Kell

1/13 Fairway Crescent
FORSTER NSW 2428

Dear Ossie

Firstly, my ramblings about Norrie, I do not know if John can use any of it in a newsy letter, if not, just put it in the garbage.

By the way, I don't know if you know how Norrie got his name "Pudden". It was not because of his girth around his waist, but Trip Lynch nicknamed him "Pudden Head" because he reckoned his brains was swelling it. Old Trip had a wicked sense of humour and was also a wonderful character.

I mentioned of course that Norrie liked to be involved in any type of debate, but others like Jimmy Smith, Frank Brewer, Trip Lynch and Owen Bond could also hold their own. There were always good humoured discussions and had your sides sore from laughing.

When the singing session started we would be all sitting around in a circle, each one in turn had to introduce his song, then all would join in. It was good fun.

Enclosed donation, sorry I missed last year.

I hope you have a good roll up on Anzac Day and that the decision on the future of Regiment is resolved to everyone's satisfaction.

I wish I could have been there, however remember me to anyone I would know.

Regards, Ken

PS John and yourself have been invaluable to our survival to this stage.

Vale NQM (Pudden) Jones

During our lifetime we are privileged to have known a few unforgettable people, and for me "Norrie" was one of them.

As an original of "A" Troop, and a bit wet behind the ears at only just having turned 17 years of age, I was to share the same hut with Norrie and many others when we first marched into Ingleburn in 1939. Then the same "EPIP" tent in Quastina in Palestine when we first arrived there, and then again at Khassa when we returned from the disaster that was Greece. The members sharing the tent at Quastina were a wonderful group of chaps, and to the best of my memory comprised Frank Brewer, Owen Bond, Teddy Hewit, Trip Lynch, Teddy Booth, Benny Webb, Jimmy (Jew) Smith, Cec Hartley, Cliffy Hunter, Bruce Fowler, Norrie Jones and myself.

Every night we generally played cards (Pontoon), wrote letters and told yarns. Finally singing our stupid heads off, assisting our renditions by lubricating our tonsils with bottled beer. It was a camaraderie which I am sure we all remember enjoying.

I was also with "Pudden" when we left Greece on the "Dilwarra", as he grabbed both Owen Bond and I, to assist Dougy Sontag and himself with the Bren gun. We took up a position on the side deck, just outside the bridge. Norrie blazed away 100's of rounds from the Bren at the German Dive Bombers intent on sinking us (they hit the Costa Rica just to our flank).

And then in Ceylon when Bluey Cansdell and I, were both given an old 18 Por MKII, and 48 rounds of ammunition and sited on either side of a bay down on the coast. To engage any Jap landing barges if that situation eventuated. We were isolated miles away from the rest of the Regiment, and almost every night Norrie who liked a bit of a chat, and better still if it developed into a vigorous discussion would hold centre stage. He had a point of view about everything and was very enthusiastic about expressing them. There was never a dull moment in his presence and it was always a pleasure to be in his company. I certainly missed that more frequent friendship when I was promoted to Sgt. And posted to "C" Troop in 1942.

We that are left, always were and still are "a close band of brothers", and I like many others will miss the long telephone conversations we used to have. His calls must have been very costly indeed.

He was a good soldier, wearing his uniform both before and during the war with pride. He was held in high regard and had a character which was very unique.

We are all nearing the last roll call and I will not be surprised if he is not up there somewhere waiting “and greets us with” – “what kept you so long, come and join a little chat group, we are all a bunch of old ex-diggers”.

I value having known him, and I am sure there are many others like myself.

Ken Kell

From Ossie Pearce: (“The Roving O.P.”)

Bruce Cruickshank

I rang Bruce recently, he lives in Moonby Retirement Village, Kootingal (Phone 0267603595). Original “B” Troop, his wife answered the phone, she sounded bright and cheerful, I had been told she was very ill, when I spoke to Bruce he said she is losing her eye sight, another terrible thing to look forward to.

George Quinn

George rang to inform me that his wife who had been very ill for sometime had passed on. He remarked about John Hynes who had been awarded the Order of Australia in the recent Birthday Honours. George’s phone number is 0296006925.

Tony Pazzi

Rang, he has curtailed his swimming, even he has admitted it’s too cold, he still visits the baths area to talk to the various people who frequent them. Tony has always been a very sociable person and a great bloke. Phone 0738893662.

Sue Morgan

Norrie Jones’ daughter, is having great difficulty accepting the death of her father. Norrie was a great bloke and father “Mr. Have a Chat”. Sue has the Motel in Caloundra. City Centre Motel, 20 Orsova Crescent, Caloundra. Phone 07 54913301.

Australian War Memorial Photography Section

I was speaking to Andrew Jack (02 62434337) the other day and during the conversation he mentioned they are seeking photo’s (in uniform if possible) of persons who were killed or died on Active Service. They are creating a photographic memorial and my immediate thoughts went to Alf Daniels and Jim Wheeler, both killed in N.G. Alfie Daniels was one of the nicest fellows that ever lived.

Phill Hatton

Went to see Phill recently, he is now in Nunyar United Aged Care, 8 Neilson Avenue, Peakhurst, Phone 0295338180. He looks very well and is still trying to remain active and he still likes to read. During his time as a POW with the Italians, he had an arrangement with them so that he got various books on loan from the Vatican Library.

Ron Mooney

Rang the other week, first to inform me that Harry Sutton had passed on. Harry was a Sgt. In 2nd Battery and when he was commissioned he was posted to 2/2nd Field Regiment, and second to enquire if I knew of Bill Fernely, as Bill was living in the same complex. Bill was and is, very vague, and said he was in the 2/1st as it turns out. Bill tried to enlist in 1939 but was in a reserved occupation – Radiologist, so no go, eventually he enlisted with 2/1st A.G.H. and after some time he managed to transfer to 2/1st Field Regiment.

Ron was an original Officer in 2nd Battery, and like many others of the Regiment transferred to 2/9 Fd, 16 Fd etc and when the war finished he was a Lt-Col.

Steve Jack

Before Steve marched out, he managed to put some of his experiences on a disc, nine hours in fact. His nephew, John Underwood, who lives in Gulargambone, said he would arrange for this disc to be transcribed to print; John rang recently, I had never met the man, to say he was in Sydney and could he visit. The answer was yes, what a terrific bloke, just another Steve Jack, manner and build, the short visit was 4 ½ hours.

Marshall “Nugget” Currie

I rang Marshall, he hasn't been very well of late, laid up with bronchitis, severe coughing and confined to bed, he must be sick for this to happen. Phone 029670 4554.

Secretary's note:

“Nugget” is now back to his cheerful self and giving cheek at the ripe old age of 91.

4/5-7 Larkin St
Roseville, NSW 2069
17 June 2007

Mr John Hynes
3/281 Elizabeth St
Sydney 2000

Dear Mr Hynes,

Jim Blair

I am David Blair, a son of Jim Blair (died 1991), who was in the 2/1st Field Regiment. He served in the Aitape-Wewak area of New Guinea in 1945, and also in 1943 in the Port Moresby area. After the War Jim regularly attended the Anzac Day dinner of the unit. On at least one occasion my brother Richard also attended.

Jim was a journalist on The Bulletin. He also wrote about 57 short stories and related pieces, most of which were published in The Bulletin. With help from Richard, I have been engaged in collecting all the stories together to make one book, which is being self-published. The title:

Blown to Blazes and Other Works of J.B. Blair

(One of his stories is Blown to Blazes.) The book also contains some commentary from me, including a biography of Jim. Most of the stories are humorous. Three of Jim's stories are based on World War II experiences.

In 2 to 3 weeks time I'll be doing a mail-out to relatives and friends (and some libraries) who may be interested in purchasing a copy (at cost only). Actual printing will be in about 10 weeks time as the final proofreading is still to be done.

It is not planned, at this stage, to produce the book in commercial quantities.

I have a preliminary question and a request. My recollection (possibly faulty) is that Jim said that both a battalion and an artillery regiment consisted of about 1000 men. My question: is this correct? (If numbers varied over time, the figure of most interest would be for the 1945 New Guinea period. I mention the figure in an editor's comment to one of Jim's WW II stories.)

It occurs to me that some of Jim's army colleagues may be interested in acquiring a copy of the book. I would like to make them aware of it in some way. This could be done in either of two ways.

(1) If you could make available the mailing list, I could mail the notice out to each member (if the numbers are not too large).

(2) Alternatively, if you have a regular newsletter, perhaps you would allow me to insert a notice about the book.

I would be grateful if you can help.

Regards

David Blair

David Blair

Phone (02) 9413 3353

Email davidblair@tpg.com.au

From Hon. Secretary, John Hynes

Re letter from David Blair, son of our late member, Jim Blair, who “marked out” in 1991.

Jim was one of a draft of “roes” who joined at Moresby late 1942/early 1943.

They were a bright lot. Jim, a well respected essayist, author and journalist, together with Dick Barbour (a District Court Judge to be) and Des Ryan (Chief Librarian to be).

All three served well as O.P “acks”, but were hopeless when it came to “putting up” a two-man tent.

I have two copies of David’s book, a nostalgic reminder of Sydney pre-war and early post-war. They arrived shortly after the “Bulletin” ceased publication after more than a hundred years of entertaining Sydney town.

My purchase was principally for my small regimental library and for me, reminders of the old pink page “Bully” which I received regularly from home during the war years.

I paid \$73.00 for two books (good value) which David subsequently repaid because of my assistance with regimental references in the book.

I protested this kindly action and finally after much discussion we agreed to donate the \$73.00 to our regimental funds. Details re purchase are in David’s letter.

From Hon Secretary, John Hynes

In this issue of “Kibbles Post” we have published the first half of Marshall (“Nugget”) Currie’s story – the half ending with the return of this regiment to the Pacific and two more campaigns.

The second half, we propose to include after completion, in the next issue of the “Post”.

We also have as with “Nugget’s” effort the first half of Steve Jack’s story dictated in his last days to his nephew.

Steve’s story needs some editing before publication. Hopefully we will have the two halves ready for the next issue of the “Post”.

Nugget Currie's Story – Part 1

I have been asked to share a few reminiscences with the readers of Kibble's Post. Like most of us who experienced the war, I do have a few stories. I will tell some of these briefly, in two parts. In this issue I will cover our North African campaign, and in the next I will focus on our New Guinea period.

First, I should say I did not enlist to fight for King and country. No King ever fought for me. I thought my country hadn't done me too much good either. I'd left school in the depression and humped a swag for years around country roads, on bicycle or by 'jumping the rattler' for a free ride from one town to the next. You had to be on the move then, half-starved, always looking to find work or a feed. Or just to collect dole coupons, which you couldn't do twice in a row in the same town. The government wanted to keep us moving on, not congregating in towns and causing a nuisance.

I was a country kid from Kandos. In September 1939 I was trying for a job in the shale refinery at Glen Davis, but they stopped hiring just when I made it to the head of the queue. Discouraged, I was back home with mum, about to hit the road again, when the announcement came over the wireless that we were at war. I had told mum I was going to Sydney to try for work, and she made me promise not to join the army. Most Australian mothers had awful memories of men lost in the First World War. There were none in our family, but everyone had friends. I promised I wouldn't enlist.

In Sydney, I stayed with Aunt Edie, my mother's sister in Glebe. Every morning Auntie gave me tuppence to get the Sydney Morning Herald for the employment ads. Every day it was the same story, nothing any good. One day, frustrated as usual, I read in the paper that 75 men were needed to fill up the AIF Sixth Division and go overseas. Despite my promise to Mum, the chance to get five shillings a day, enough for three feeds and a bit of pocket money, was too good to resist. I would enlist. Mum would have to get over it.

At times I thought I was never meant to join up. First, I was knocked over by a car when riding my pushbike from Glebe to Victoria Barracks to enlist. The car finished up on top of me, pinned me down, and it took near a dozen blokes to lift it off. I was given ten quid to fix my broken bike, carted it back to Auntie's house for safekeeping, and took a tram to the Barracks. But with the time lost, I got there too late. They had filled their quota for the day. I kicked up a fuss and said if you don't take me I'll go back to the country and the war will have to do without me. So they sent me off to Marrickville where there was another quota. But the Doctor there told me I was too short and they couldn't accept me. I got a bit over-excited at this, and the doctor finally thought it would be easier just to take me. But he warned me I would most likely get rejected at Ingleburn.

Now I'd been shooting rabbits and wallabies for a feed since I was eleven and so at Ingleburn I had no trouble training in use of a rifle.. The city kids had no idea. No one complained again about my height. After training, Mum came down from Kandos to see me before I went overseas. She was not impressed that I had volunteered but she made the most of it.

I sailed on the Orford. I remember only a few of us had the first shipboard meal, going out through the heads. Most of the blokes were sick. Seasickness never bothered me; I loved it on the water. We were the first Australian convoy of troops headed for the war. I looked forward to seeing England, and being fed, and to excitement and adventure. I had no idea. What on earth was in our minds?

I had always been keen on physical fitness, and on the Orford I would go off by myself to do my daily exercises. A couple of officers had noticed this, and decided to make me the PT instructor for the unit. I wasn't asked, I was just 'volunteered'. I had never seen myself as a 'leader,' and said I wouldn't have a clue how to take the blokes through a routine. No problem, they said. You just do your drill, and we'll make sure they follow you. So I ended up leading all these blokes through my exercises. That was quite an experience for me.

Boxing was popular on the Orford and I had done my share of fighting when I was growing up. I wasn't bad. Not deadly, but quick enough to duck and persistent with my left. So I won the nine stone Boxing Championship for the Regiment. As a result I was challenged for the nine stone Championship for the whole ship. I had a go, but was thoroughly thrashed by an infantry chap called Johnny Freelander. He made a real mess of me. Later I found out he was a professional boxer and had once held the championship for the Philippines. I was told afterwards that following our fight, he went to his cabin and cried his eyes out when he realised what he'd done to a poor amateur kid from the country. Later he always came looking for me on leave breaks and would buy me a beer. We became friends. The Orford's Captain presented the winners of each championship with a cigarette case. I still have mine to this day.

We disembarked at the Suez Canal and had our first meal ashore in Egypt. It was camel sausages! Then we boarded a train for Palestine and went into training in the Sinai desert.

Training included kitchen fatigue. I hated it! One day, peeling potatoes and cleaning greasy pots, I could hear the trumpeters practicing. Someone had told me the trumpeters didn't do kitchen duties, so when I found out they were short of trumpeters, I decided to try to join them. I said I had played in the Kandos town band as a kid. But they said, you can't be a trumpeter because you're a gunner. You had to be a signaller. Not to be deterred, I transferred from the 25 pounders, started training as a signaller, and so became a trumpeter.

Well I soon began to think I had made a big mistake. One by one the other trumpeters dropped out until finally I was the only one left. I had to take all the calls. I had to be first up in the morning, and last down at night. Worse, my leave kept getting knocked back - naturally someone had to be in camp every day to play the trumpet. Me! Well, one day I'd just had enough. My leave had been refused yet again and I decided that was it. When ordered to get regimentally dressed and play the retreat for the changing of the guard, I refused. I just spat the dummy. The duty officer promptly placed me under arrest.

I was brought before the Colonel, and I told him why I did it. It just wasn't fair that I was the only one who never got any leave. He listened, and to me he seemed sympathetic. Nice enough bloke, I thought. But then he gave me 14 days detention for

refusing an order. He picked up the phone right in front of me to ring the British army prison, which was used for our blokes as well. After a few words he put down the phone and told me the prison was full. He would have to give me hard labour under detention in our own camp. So he instructed me to make a flower garden around the officer's mess. He gave me a vehicle to drive into Tel Aviv and get plants. I got some, and planted them where he wanted the garden laid out. I watered them carefully but they quickly died, stuck as they were hopelessly in desert sand. So I had to keep driving into Tel Aviv and Jerusalem, where the other blokes took their leave, almost every day to replace the plants, which kept right on dying. I got to see the sights even though I was refused leave. And I had the best tucker I ever had, eating the same food as the officers had in their mess. Refusing that order was the best thing I ever did.

In my new role as a signaller, I underwent extensive training in communications. I found the going tough, having never been a good student. But with help and a stubborn streak, I got through. While waiting to be fully equipped for action we were put in with a British army unit at Mount Carmel and trained on Anti-Aircraft guns. I met an English trumpeter there and we decided to work together on the calls. I suggested we go to the canteen for a beer and work out the details. Well, we had a few beers, and by the time we played our first call together we were feeling pretty merry. We swung the call like it was a jazz piece. We were having great fun. The officer of the guard however didn't see the humour of it and locked us up in the guardhouse. But later that night they had to let us out to play the last post. And soon they found they had to let us off completely, since we were the only trumpeters.

Of course I did get periods of leave, and enjoyed great breaks in Cairo, Alexandria and Tel Aviv. In Cairo I climbed the Great Pyramid, built for the pharaoh Cheops. It is nearly fifteen hundred feet tall, and it took me twelve and a half minutes running up, flat out, to get to the top. I'd take a bit longer now. We would go up in twos or threes. I was so fascinated, I did the climb about a dozen times. You had to leap from the edge of each big stone block up on to the next block, all the way up. I carved my name into a stone at the very top. Near the base of the pyramid was a small opening with stone steps leading down a narrow shaft. Children playing there would go down the steps and seem to disappear into the sand. I went down, and at the bottom of the steps found a ledge leading to a much smaller opening. I could just squeeze my head in to take a look, by twisting it sideways. Luckily I had the smallest head in the Australian army! I was looking into a smaller room where a solid stone coffin sat on a ledge about 8 feet long. Robbers had cleaned the room out, leaving just the mummy. The outer cloth of this disturbed mummy had almost completely decayed, exposing what was left of the skeleton. Under the ribcage was a tiny pile of dust, the remains of the body. I was told it was the grave of the 'Prime Minister' of Cairo at the time the pyramids were built.

Once, camped in Alexandria, I swam in Cleopatra's pool. Perhaps it was the very place where she took her bath in milk. You could clearly see the remains of ancient rooms and pools under the surface of the water. In Alexandria some of the boys would visit a certain premises in Sister Street, where a 'good time' could be had! I never ventured there myself, and perhaps it's just as well. One day the building was blown to bits in a bombing raid. It was all over for the poor devils in there at the time.

Tel Aviv was to me a very sophisticated 'cosmopolitan' city, with wine bars and coffee bars on the footpath, the likes of which we had never seen at home in those days. Once I was with some blokes having a meal in a street café when we met up with some French sailors, about half-a-dozen of them. We all became friendly over a feed and they ended up inviting us to look over their submarine. We spent an hour or so on board and it was very interesting. We learned that they had escaped from Syria, and that in fact they were Vichy French, who were supposed to be our enemies, as they were collaborating with the Germans. I think they were a bit mixed up though. They seemed to be half friend, half enemy. Anyway we had a good time together and I don't know what happened to them after that.

When we finished training in Palestine we went into action for the first time, in North Africa. I will never forget our initial engagement with the Italian army, at Bardia. As a signaller, I had a box seat watching our Australian infantry at work, firing then charging with their bayonets. They were so well trained, professional and efficient. I was proud of them, and proud to be supporting them.

At Tobruk, Bill Gardner and I ran our cables then placed a few stones around us for protection. The rocky ground was too hard to dig in. We settled in behind the stones to wait for the dawn barrage. When it started, we quickly found that we were copping the brunt of it. Shells were coming directly at us thick and fast. We soon realised a troop of four enemy guns was trained right on us. In the dark of night we had not realised that we set up our position right on the ridge of a hill, in full view of the enemy. We were sitting ducks. The Italians obviously thought we were an observation post, for they seemed determined to take us out. We were pinned down pretty hopelessly. At one stage I took out a matchstick and held it up in front of me. "What are you doing?" asked Bill. "This is a big tree trunk," I said. "They'll never see us now." Then a cable broke. As we were in full view, it was practically suicide to go out after it. But orders coming down the phone were insistent and desperate. We drew straws using a broken match and a full one. I won the trip. I went out, a shell burst near me, and I was flung to blazes. I vaguely remember Bill screaming "You bastards, you've killed Nugget," as he dragged me back behind our pathetic stone wall.

We leapfrogged into Derna and then our Regiment captured Barce, all by ourselves before the infantry arrived. We took Benghazi and rested at the nearby aerodrome, where Prime Minister Bob Menzies paid us a visit on his way to London. That night on the 7 p.m. BBC news he said he was proud of his boys, now enjoying a well-earned overnight rest at the Benghazi aerodrome. About an hour after this broadcast, I went out the front of our dormitory shed to answer a call of nature. The entry was through a pair of big wooden doors set on heavy hinges. I left these doors ajar as I stood just outside on the top step. I heard planes coming over and guessed they were enemy planes that would just pass us over just as they had the night before. We had no planes of our own in the area. I looked up but it was too dark to see anything. Then for the first time ever, I heard a screaming bomb. It whistled down and landed right in front of me. I heard the explosion then woke up to find I'd been thrown to the back of the dormitory, a distance of some 60 feet. The blast had blown the doors clean off their hinges, and flattened them on the floor. I was in some pain – I had a six-inch nail through my heel, still attached to a plank from the door. The worst of the pain was because the boys were holding my leg and trying to pull the nail out of me. I cursed Bob Menzies for giving away our position in his radio address an hour earlier.

They wanted to take me to the hospital in Tobruk but I wouldn't be in it. The boys looked after me for a couple of weeks until the poison had gone out of my foot and the swelling was down. I would spend each day in our maintenance truck and they would lift me out when we settled down each night. One day in the desert an Italian biplane attacked our truck. We spent a frightening hour avoiding his bursts of fire, zigzagging and using the old infantry tactic of calling to the driver from the back of the truck, the moment we saw a burst of fire from the plane. The driver would then accelerate and get ahead of the round before it hit the ground.

We had done a good job in the desert, with our allies, in removing the Italian presence and taking many prisoners. An English army unit finally rounded up the remnant Italians, and that was the end of our desert campaign. I recall an eerie experience as we prepared to return east. The distant sound of bagpipes came drifting toward us through the still desert air. Then a lone British soldier, playing the pipes his regimental kilt, emerged slowly from behind the brow of a hill, followed by a party of Italian prisoners and their English guards.

We were preparing our guns for movement and forming a convoy to head back to Alexandria, when suddenly a lone German plane spotted us. Realising we were vulnerable with our guns inoperable, he circled for a run at us. We all dived sideways as he came through strafing us. He was low and close, and I clearly remember the big grin on his face, as he enjoyed toying with his sitting ducks. He came around for another run, and we dived once more out of his line of fire. In he came and the strafing started up again. We took pot shots at him with our rifles, when suddenly from nowhere came the big sound of a Bofur gun. It had been quickly set up by an English gun crew assigned to our protection. Bullseye. We saw the smoke trailing from the German plane and as we watched him crash into the desert, I supposed he was grinning no more. Thank God for the British Bofur blokes.

I never got to Greece. My Battery was still delayed waiting for boats, when we got word that Greece had gone. German forces had comprehensively crushed the allied troops and a mass evacuation was under way. I gather we were pretty lucky not to have been there, although at the time we felt pretty frustrated at missing out. We had succeeded so well in the desert, we now thought we could do anything.

With Greece abandoned, we returned to Palestine for more training and eventually regrouped with those of our men who managed to get back from Greece. We also got some replacements. We expected deployment to Syria, and trained with that in mind. But the Japanese entry into the war, and especially the fall of Singapore, had changed everything. Australia itself was threatened, and Prime Minister John Curtin decided to bring us all back to defend the home front.

I boarded the ship Westlander bound, we hoped, for home. We had no idea of what lay ahead for us in the steamy undergrowth of New Guinea. The Japanese in the jungle would prove far deadlier to deal with than the lukewarm Italian resistance we so easily overcame in North Africa. The greatest challenges and the worst moments for the Regiment still lay ahead. In the next instalment I will continue my story, with a focus on our experiences in New Guinea.

Grecian Memories from Ossie Pearce

Alec Moroney and I were reminiscing the other day, it got around to Greece and those rather hectic days at Kalamata and the withdrawal, whilst we were all sitting on the beach waiting our turn to move. What would happen, a destroyer would come alongside the pier, load up and away, this by the way, in complete darkness and room for only one destroyer at a time. The Navy certainly knew their business. When it came time for the Regiment to move out and to what turned out to be the last destroyer, HMS Hero, those that were taken off were transferred to the troop ship “Dilwarra”, there were still some thousands on the beach including many from the Regiment.

The Germans were now surrounding Kalamata. The CO 2/1st Field Regiment Lt. Col. H.E. Harlock had to counter attack against the Germans with a limited number of combat troops and arms, captured 2 Field Guns and a tank but eventually German weight of arms and troops won the day, before surrender, the order everyone for themselves was given. Several Greek fishing boats, called caiques, suddenly had new owners; some escaped to Crete, Egypt, Turkey, others were sunk by Stuka Dive Bombers like the one Alec was on, with disastrous results; many killed and wounded. Alec Moroney’s best friend Shorty Anderson and Norm Smart were both wounded. Alex removed his boots to help in his swim to shore, both Alex and Norm helped Shorty and Len Heery ashore. Shorty Anderson was very badly wounded and Norm Smart, although he was severely wounded himself swam back to the sinking caique looking for a side haversack, which contained some field dressings and other medical supplies that were urgently required by Shorty Anderson. The wounds received by Shorty were too much. Shorty was buried on the shore line. The unselfish acts and deeds performed by Norm Smart to a mate went unrecognized by the powers that be, like many other things.

From Hon. Secretary, John Hynes:

In 1959 I was Chairman of the Printing Committee producing "Six Years in Support" (our Regimental History).

"Mick" Haywood authorised a first class book but we had time restraints because we had a time limit on finance from the war-time "comforts fund" which was being wound-up. I always regretted that we made no provision for the story of our "P's.O.W." in Europe. In later years I tried to encourage our surviving "P's.O.W." to contribute some words but to no avail.

Now however we have a really good story from Doug Nix through the services of his "good mate", one Jim Ottaway.

Letter from Jim Ottaway

17th April 2007

99 Hardys Road
MUDGEERABA QLD 4213

Dear John

It was good to speak with you on Monday morning in relation to the short story I wrote about Doug Nix's experience as a POW in Stalag XVIII A and various work camps in Austria during World War II.

Doug is a very good mate of mine and we get together to talk about his war experiences on a regular basis. His stories are fascinating!

I have enclosed a copy of the story in case you would like to include it in the next copy of the Kibbles Post. By the way, I very much enjoy reading your publication. Doug drops over a copy of it when he has finished reading it.

I have also included a copy of a photograph taken from the book "Prison Camp Spies" by Howard Greville. Doug is in the front row far left, half kneeling, wearing braces. This was taken at the paper factory work camp in Frantschach St Gertraud in 1942. I have also included an extract from the book which makes reference to Doug and also an extract which refers to an incidence which relates to Doug's attempt to burn down a part of the paper factory.

I hope you continue to publish your magazine well into the future. I think it is very important that the 2/1st Field Regiment is remembered in this way.

Regards, Jim Ottaway

Doug Nix – POW (Europe)

Doug Nix (NX3365) was one of the many thousand Australian Servicemen who were captured and imprisoned by the Axis forces during World War II. Doug was a Kriegie...a Kriegsgefangener, German for Prisoner of War (POW). Doug was incarcerated in Austria by Hitler's German Army.

Doug, a resident of Paddington in Sydney, and his mates, locally known as "the Sunshine Boys", enlisted in Militia in 1938 when they were only 17 years of age. They enlisted because they would receive a pay and accommodation, be clothes and be issued with a pair of boots. Doug and his mates were asked to obtain a letter from their parents prior to being accepted as Cadets, as they were underage. Doug's father signed the letter on the proviso that Doug would not be posted overseas. Doug and his mates were assigned to the 109th Battery at Victoria Barracks.

When volunteers were sought to go overseas to fight the Germans, Doug volunteered straight away. The day was 3 November, 1939. Doug's father had no recourse as Doug had "volunteered" for overseas service.

Doug was assigned to the 2/1st Field Regiment, 6th Division, Australian Imperial Force as a Gunner. Doug, along with others of the Division, departed Sydney on 10 January 1940 aboard the S.S. Orford.

Doug saw action in North African and Greek campaigns prior to being captured in Kalamata, Greece on 28th April 1941.

Captured

Doug was captured with three other Allied personnel (including his mate, Gunner Teddy Barnes). All four, along with others, attempted to board a boat near Kalamata after being given the command "every man for himself". As the boat was being bombed by the Germans, some of the men jumped overboard. Many were injured, including those who were in the water due to the pressure from the bombs exploding in the water. Doug, Teddy and two other Allied servicemen (both injured) found shelter in a cave on the beach. Eventually Doug and Teddy went looking for food and were captured. Doug heard the now familiar saying..."For you the war is over". The injured men were eventually found by the Germans and treated. Unfortunately, one of the injured men died a little time later.

Doug, along with thousand of other Allied servicemen, was held prisoner in a field camp for about two weeks on the beach at Kalamata. There were many olive trees about but Doug did not like olives. When fed, the men only received hard Greek biscuits and a splash of olive oil. There was no shelter other than shade from the olive trees. Bugs, lice and dysentery were rife. Conditions were atrocious. The German's intention was to drain any remaining strength out of the men to enable complete dominance over them.

Salonika

After a few weeks most of the men were crammed into Animal carriages on a train destined for Salonika. Towards the last part of the journey they were ordered out of the carriage and force-marched to Salonika, as a section of the tracks had been destroyed by bombing raids.

Salonika was another transit camp which was formerly a Greek Army Military Base. Again the conditions were atrocious. Food was very poor, if received at all. Huge bed bugs, lice and other vermin were ever present. Dysentery was the norm rather than the exception. Malaria was also prevalent. Parades were ordered four to five times a day to enable head counts to be performed. Doug was in the Salonika camp for out three to four weeks.

Destination...Wolfsberg, Austria

Doug was again placed in a recently used animal train carriage along with other Allied servicemen and transported to a then unknown destination. It ended up being Wolfsberg, Austria. The journey took about six days and was absolutely horrendous. On the side of each carriage was the sign "Hommes 40 Chevaux 8" (i.e. 40 men, 8 horses). Well over fifty men were crammed into each carriage with very little water and only a few openings to allow in air. Similar inhumane train journeys around this time are graphically described in such books as "A Kind of Cattle" by Barney Roberts (2/12th BN) and "Forty Men, Eight Horses" by Douglas Arthur (106th Lancashire Hussars). Unfortunately, many men did not survive these torrid journeys.

Doug's mate from North Africa and Greece, Teddy Barnes, who was in the same carriage as Doug, escaped from the moving train by removing some of the floor boards. Doug considered escaping at this time but thought better of it. Many years later Doug found out that Teddy had eventually made it to freedom with the help of local partisans.

Stalag XVIII A

After arriving totally depleted at Wolfsberg Railway Station, the men were force-marched to Stammlager XVIII A (Stalag XVIII A). Official German documents indicate that Doug arrived at Stalag XVIII A on 20 June 1941.

Doug was assigned POW No. 197. Doug wore his POW ID bound to his left wrist, rather than the usual habit of hanging the ID around the neck. This was a give-away to men when I saw a photo of a group of Allied POW's in the book "Prison Camp Spies" by Howard Greville (Royal Signals). I immediately recognized a young Doug in the photo. The visible tattoo was another give-away.

Doug was in the Stalag XVIII A for about six months. He did, however, return to the camp on a number of occasions over the course of the next four years, generally to receive punishment (i.e. being locked in solitary confinement for "21 days bread and water) for escaping from various work camps.

Doug was given the nickname “Abo” (in those days a slang term used for an Aborigine). This name was given to him by a Scotsman, in the first instance and that name stuck with him. The Scotsman explained that he was surprised to see a white Australian as he thought all Australians were Aborigines.

It was during these early days in Stalag XVIII A when Doug and over 200 other Allied POW’s signed a “homemade” Crown and Anchor mat which was used for gambling (cigarettes and potatoes). This mat now stands pride of place in the World War II – European POW section in the Australian War Memorial.

Even though he was in a camp with about 20,000 other men from all nationalities, surrounded by barbed wire, guard towers and armed guards and living in terrible conditions with very little food, Doug was pragmatic about his confinement. Doug realised that there was not much that could be done other than for him to create as much havoc as possible for the Germans, thereby keeping valuable troops away from the fighting. He set about doing this almost from the word go.

Doug also recognized early in his incarceration the usefulness of learning the German language. He set about this task and took every opportunity to expand his vocabulary. It was to come in very handy throughout his years as a POW and also in later years. Doug can still speak fluent German to this day.

Frantschach St Gertraud

Doug’s first abbeitskommando” (work camp/labour camp) was a paper factory in Frantschach St Gertraud. He was moved there in early 1942. The work at the factory involved moving logs and different types of factory work. It was during this time that Doug attempted to burn down the factory. It would have been a success if not for the flames being seen by an Austrian working on a cigarette break. Arson was suspected and the Gestapo were called in to investigate. This incident is recorded in Howard Greville’s book “Prison Camp Spies”. Doug was suspected of involvement but no proof could be found at the time. However, a few years later the German’s eventually caught up with Doug with evidence against him for sabotage.

Some of Doug’s mates during this time include George Rushton (2/12th Bn) from Tasmania, John Tasker (4th Queen’s Own Hussar) and an Englishman with the surname Oates (RAVC).

Also, during his time at the paper factory, Doug and two other POW’s escaped and jumped a train (not knowing where it was heading). As it turned out it was en route through Italy. They got off just short of Trieste and hid in the bushes. They eventually walked into town at night looking for food. Unfortunately, they were unaware that a curfew was in place and they were picked up by the Italian Police. They were questioned and returned to Stalag XVIII A and given 21 days “bread and water in solitary confinement”. However, they, like others in their predicament, did manage to get a little more (e.g. cigarettes) through the ingenuity and sleight of hand of other prisoners.

Graz

After a short stint back in Stalag SVIIIA Doug was moved to a work camp in Graz. In this camp the POW's were made to unload coal from trains at a railway siding. In Graz the POW's resided in work sheds close to the mastering yards. It was not a compounded prison.

The International Red Cross eventually closed the camp down because of threat of bombing raids due to its proximity to the mastering yards. Doug spent about three months in this camp.

Waldenstein

Eventually Doug was moved from Graz to Waldenstein (Schloss/Castle) because he had a reputation as being "gefluchter" or "diziplinar" (i.e. an escapee/troublemaker). Waldenstein was set up for the more difficult POW's. It was known as a strafelager where heavy work, such as road works, was required to be undertaken by the prisoners.

Doug tells of one story when approximately 21 prisoners escaped from the castle by tying together pieces of bedding materials and lowering themselves down behind the toilets into a creek below. They marched back to the main camp (Stalag XVIII A) to the dismay of the camp guards and Commandant. The senior ranking POW made a complaint on their behalf about the heavy work that they had to perform and the terrible conditions they had to put up with.

All the escapees were given "21 days bread and water in solitary confinement" at Stalag XVIII A. After this time they were let loose in the camp. There was an order at the camp that certain POW's (including Doug) were not to go out to work again because they were consider "gefluchter". Many of the rebel POW's changed ID's with those who wanted to stay in the main camp so that they could go back out to work and cause as much strife as possible. Doug was one of these.

Leoben

Shortly thereafter Doug was posted to a glass factory in Leoben. Doug was there only a short time. A young guard, who had just returned from the Eastern Front (frost bitten) and whose parents had been killed in air raids on Dresden, came up to Doug and another fellow with a loaded pistol and said he would leave one of them "lying in the snow". As a result of this threat Doug escaped two days later and was picked up by the civilian Police in Obdach. Doug was interrogated and he explained why he had escaped. He was then handed over to the military and interrogated and he was returned to Stalag XVIII A. Again, 21 days bread and water!

Prior to being captured Doug and John Tasker (4th Queen's Own Hussars) were moving through a very muddy paddock on a dark wet night. Doug said that he thought someone was following them. It turned out to be a paddock which housed mares and a stallion. It was a stallion on their trail. They moved a lot quicker once they realised the stallion was stalking them.

St Lambrecht

From Stalag XVIII A Doug was moved to St Lambrecht. This was around mid 1944. Doug remained there until around May 1945. At St Lambrecht the POW's performed road works, bridge work and repairs to rail lines (e.g. at Mariahoff Railway Station) etc. They also unloaded bags of copra from the rail trucks at Mariahoff and placed them in storage sheds for the nearby dynamite factory. Doug vividly recalls seeing the Mariahoff Station being strafed and bombed by the Allies. Doug, some other prisoners and their guard dived for cover under the train as bullets and hot bullet casings fell around them.

At this camp there were generally 10-12 men in each working group.

The POW's were held in an old mill on Mur (tal) River located about 2 km from St Lambrecht.

Doug became very good friends with John Connor a Sapper with the Royal Engineers. Doug had met John previously but had not had time to forge a close friendship.

During one of their assignments Doug remembers removing his worn out slouch hat and placing it in the concrete mix used to repair an old stone dam near St. Lambrecht. Doug was hoping that eventually the hat would disintegrate and the dam would collapse.

As a footnote to this incident, a few years ago Doug was talking with the then Chief of the Defence Force, Major General Peter Cosgrove at the official dedication of the Australian Ex-Prisoners of War Memorial in Ballarat. Doug asked Major General Cosgrove why he always wore a slouch hat. I understand his answer was that he wanted to show respect for all those who had worn and currently wear the slouch hat in the protection of Australia. During the discussion Doug explained what had happened to his original slouch hat all those years ago in Austria and the reason why he had done it. A month or so later Doug received a new slouch in the mail from Major General Cosgrove.

During his time at St Lambrecht, the Gestapo, still investigating the paper factory in Frantschack St Gertraud, caught up with Doug and they were going to move him back to Stalag XVIII A to face court martial. However, before this could occur, the guards advised the prisoners that they could leave the camp. The prisoners thought it may have been a setup so they stayed put. However, after a little time they realised that the guards have gone, obviously fleeing the advancing Allied troops. Doug, John Connor and one other POW joined up with some locals and drove their "charcoal burner, six-seater" car towards the advancing troops, with a Union Jack flag over the front of the car. They eventually came upon a British tank in the middle of the road, south of St. Georgen. One of the occupants of the tank called out for them to identify themselves. They yelled back that they were POW's. Eventually this car was handed over to the Brits.

Free at Last!

The British troops looked after the POW's with food, showers, medical treatment and new clothing.

After the British troops advanced into St Lambrecht, around June 1945, Doug, being fluent in German, was appointed as an interpreter to assist the British Field Security to weed out those Austrians who had supported the Nazis. There was a long list of names to track down and question. Doug undertook this job for about one month.

Those POW's who were still in Stalag XVIII A when the Allies were advancing up through Austria were marched by the Germans from Wolfberg to Markt Pongau (now St Johann in Pongau), a march of around 215km. The march took about thirteen days through snow in bitterly cold conditions. A number of men died on this journey.

Italy

Around August/September 1945 Doug and fellow ex-POW's were trucked over the Austro-Italian Alps to Naples. Doug met up with John Connor again in Naples. The men were issued new clothing, had a shower and were medically checked over. About a week later, they were loaded into the bomb bay of Halifax bombers (seated on school plank seats) and flown to the Air force Base in Bicester, England.

England

In September 1945 Doug arrived in England. Doug said his farewells to John Connor for the last time. He was billeted at Eastbourne. The ex-POW's were well looked after and well fed in an attempt to get some weight on them and to get them back to good health.

Doug remembers staying at Luton on the occasion and attending dances at Arncourt Hill, where the Women's ATS Camp was located.

During a visit to London, Doug bumped into his younger brother, Bob, in Sloane Square (near Buckingham Palace). While having a few ales Doug found out that Bob had also been a POW, but in a camp in Germany.

Doug eventually received orders to board a ship for his return to Australia. Doug caught a train from London to Liverpool.

"Mauretania"

Doug boarded the *Mauretania* and the whole voyage, including stops, took about three weeks. The voyage home took them through the Panama Canal. They stopped at Pearl Harbour, Hawaii for about four days to refuel. Another stop was Wellington, NZ for four days to drop off NZ troops. During his stay in Wellington Doug was billeted with a NZ friend's family.

Bob Nix was also on the *Mauretania*, however neither knew the other was on board.

Back Home

Doug arrived back in Australia October/November 1945. The men were bussed to the Sydney Showground and Doug was met by his mother, father and younger sister. At this time he was given a chit for money.

Return to Austria

In 1991 Doug returned to Austria accompanied by his eldest son Alwyn. They met up in Munich and traveled by car throughout Austria visiting many of the places where Doug had been incarcerated during World War II, including the site of Stalag XVIII A (now a motor vehicle factory), St Lambrecht and Graz.

Doug managed to meet up with a number of locals who were sympathetic towards the POW's during the war and who he had got to know quite well.

Doug's thoughts on being a POW

One of the things that stands out when I talk with Doug about his POW experiences is the camaraderie which existed between the POW's. In Doug's words, the rule which he and his mates lived by was"what is mine is yours – what is yours is mine". That is how they survived.

Doug said that the living conditions varied depending on where he was located. Some places were liveable, others were atrocious. The food, when supplied, was a small quantity and usually tasteless. Doug like many of the other POW's ended up looking like a walking advertisement for the United Nations. Clothing was scarce and one made do with what one could get. For example, a POW could be wearing pants from a Frenchman, a Belgium soldier's short and wooden clogs. What a sight! Doug was never issued with a new uniform from well before he was captured in April 1941 until meeting up with the British in St Lambrecht in June 1945.

Doug remembers only ever receiving one or two Red Cross parcels during his entire stint as a POW. The rest of the time he and his fellow POW's had to make do with what was provided by the Germans or the well-meaning locals.

Doug had and still has a great respect for many of the local Austrians, particularly those who assisted the POW's in some way. Many of them took great risks to aid the POW's.

Doug recognizes that there were differences between incarceration by the Germans and incarceration by the Japanese. However, all those who were captured were incarcerated...cut off from their families and loved ones, starved, treated as slaves, threatened and generally maltreated. The lives of the POW's were put on hold for up to five years. Doug stands by his conviction that a POW is a POW.

By the way, Doug is also a veteran of the Korean War where he originally served with the 1st Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment. Doug was later transferred to the Royal Australian Army Medical Corps, 1st Battalion.

Me!

I feel very privileged to have Doug as a mate. One can only admire Doug and the thousands of other young Australian and Allied servicemen, like my father (Harry (Hab) Ottaway (19th Field Ambulance) who fought to defend our freedom during World War II (and all wars for that matter). I can only imagine the pain and suffering experience by those who were taken prisoner by the Axis forces during World War II.

I believe all POW's should all be treated with the honour and respect they are due.

Jim Ottaway
Mudgeeraba, Gold Coast
April 2007

Editor's note: Thank you so much Jim for sending Doug's story to us – what an inspiration and one that every Australian, young and old, should hear.



Doug Nix

From: "Prison Camp Spies" – Howard Greville (1998) – Page 52
Doug is in front row – far right (half kneeling – with braces)
Paper Factory Mill – Frantschack St Gertraud in 1942

APPENDICES

TRANSMITTING INTELLIGENCE MESSAGES.

At the time that I was in the Stalag, I was never aware of the method used to communicate our information to Allied Intelligence. Some years ago I made visits to the British Public Records office and found the curator of the M19 files extremely coy about what could be viewed. One file would not be available until 2045!

However, the following researchers uncovered the fact that most intelligence material gained by prisoners in various POW camps was probably sent back to Allied intelligence by coded letters home. It should be noted that in 1979, many records were not yet open and in their book "M19", Foot and Gley do not mention Stalag XVIII A:

With the help of a Foreign Office expert called Hooker, Winterbottom and his colleagues developed a code called HK through which several people were communicating with London from Germany by November 1940.... Like several codes developed later, HK was at once fairly simple to use, and in skilled hands unusually hard to detect. All the user had to do was to indicate by the fashion in which he wrote the date that the letter contained a message, show by his opening words which part of the code he was using, and then write an apparently chatty letter, from which an inner meaning could be unravelled with the code's help.

A POST-WAR LETTER FROM "ZELLER"

Frantschach
7 October 1946

Dear friend Greville!

"My very best thanks to you for your letter and I must tell you that I was very pleased to hear that you are still alive. I have so much to report, however, I must restrict myself to what is most necessary. Therefore we should start with the place where we parted company. The man in charge of Machine No. II, Lyssy, died of hunger in 1944 in the concentration camp in Dachau. The farmer with the golden tooth, named Russmann, was arrested by the Gestapo and was murdered in a Berlin punishment prison. The charge was that he had assisted an English POW to escape. Grillitsch and his daughter Anni were imprisoned for 3 months; a Nazi had reported to the Gestapo that Rushton (Tasmanian) and Oakes (British) had hidden in his hayloft. We were able however to fix up a perfect alibi for Grillitsch and the Gestapo had to release them.

When I tell you that Jedlichka and Medwed as well as Liebenritt and Steiner (badge carrying Nazi Party members) who had not only accused the English POW Nix of starting the (factory) fire, but had struck English prisoners and treated workers from the East (Russians and Ukrainians)

like animals, are still free, doing the same job with the same rank, you can imagine the feelings of the workers. I must add that immediately after the British troops arrived I made a report to the FSS (British Field Security Service) in Wolfsburg. The Nazi Works Directors, Vögele and Franke were sacked.

Dear friend Greville! You know the attitude of the workers in Frantschach. Now just imagine:- I was commandeered with 150 workers to build a defensive position on the Pack Road, that is the one that leads to Graz. We had the task of blowing up this lovely mountain road in order to prevent the Russians from entering Carinthia. You can imagine what a show that was. The work achieved in 8 weeks amounted to what could be accomplished in 1 day. Whatever was accomplished at night by 5 of us. As the under the direction of the SS was destroyed at night by 5 of us. As the motorised SS of Styria had to return to Carinthia we managed to smash in the fuel tanks of 3 or 4 vehicles and in 10 minutes all traffic on the whole of the Pack Road came to a halt. Not even a pedestrian, let alone a vehicle, could get through. You cannot imagine the chaos that reigned in the motorised SS. You can, however, imagine the joy for us when the first English tank arrived. I offered the two English soldiers a 2 litre jug of the best Lavant Valley matured cider. They gulped it down in one go. All around there were plenty of SS fascists. In Carinthia these Hitler bandits were hunted like hares in a free hunt. From the south came English troops, from the east the Russians and from the west the American and French troops. We witnessed the collapse of the "1000 Year Reich" just as we imagined it would happen and just as we said it would happen. Now the war, if that is what we can call this crime against humanity, is over. Millions of young people are dead. Desolation and destruction were the only results of this madness. Let us hope that the whole of humanity will not believe in such madness again. We in Austria have suffered much in the events of 1939-45 and today we are a shuttlecock in world events but we have one thing that outweighs all else. That is we are Austrians again and no longer Ostmark. (The disintegration of Austria when it was annexed to Germany in 1936). We can speak freely again without running the risk of landing tomorrow in a concentration camp.

Dear friend Greville! Should you happen to meet your friends - Oakes, Rushton (Tasmanian), Nix and whatever the others are called, please give them kind regards from me and my friends. Should you however come to Austria then please don't forget to pay me a visit. I would really be delighted. Regarding your greetings to my family, I shall pass them on. We are all alive and well and thank you heartily for your regards.

Now we friends in Frantschach send most hearty greetings and hope to hear from you again.

Greetings

The mutual trust that grew between "Zeller" and myself had continued and had stood the test of time.

The upshot was that Olly was escorted back to Stalag XVIII A to face a court-martial, at which he was found guilty on the charge of indiscipline and assault. He was sentenced to several years imprisonment at the notorious fortress prison at Torgau in Poland. However, Olly did not serve one day of that sentence. On the day that he was supposed to have been transported to Torgau, with collusion from an Austrian officer he "disappeared". Just before departure, he was left alone for a few moments at the Administration Office. Seizing his chance he made off into the great throng of prisoners outside in the compound and until the end of the war lived "in smoke". His hide-out was never found and the prisoners' infiltration of the German Administration was so effective that he was able to receive his mail and enjoy most other amenities. For much of the time he mixed freely with other prisoners, safe because we always seemed to get adequate warning of impending searches.

To return to the working camp at the paper factory - the cold-blooded brute who had made the attempt on a defenceless man's life had the effrontery to ask Hughes, of all people, to do what he could to repair his defective revolver. Hughes firmly declined. As a reprisal, it was decided to try and steal the revolver in an unguarded moment and to throw it into the river. The Commandant would no doubt have been forced to report the loss and may have faced a charge of negligence. Alas, no unguarded moment arose.

There were however some further dramatic events which finally led to the Commandant being posted elsewhere. A most audacious escape was made by two prisoners one evening when they made a quick dash through the camp gate. While it was being held open by a guard to allow a party of prisoners back into the camp on their return from work, they ran through. Shots were fired at the two as they disappeared into the night but neither was hit. Escaping without food or belongings, so as not to be impeded by any gear, they fled to a pre-arranged spot in the hills. There they were supplied through the collaboration of friends in the camp and the Austrian communists from the factory.

There were several communists in the factory and they proved in word and deed to be very steadfast friends to us, a combination of Austrian kindness backed by a firm anti-Fascist party discipline. Being regular listeners to the BBC, they would give us the war news every day. In later years we learned with sorrow that several of them had lost their lives in concentration camps.

At the other end of the social scale there was a local Austrian nobleman and his family who were very pro-Allies in every respect. I had many a conversation with this gentleman and he frequently enquired about my welfare and that of my friends. He had some charming old-fashioned notions about the British way of life that could not be shaken and I think he sympathised with me in being denied the facilities for whistling "Tipperary" in a hot bath every night before dressing for dinner.

An event which caused a tremendous stir at the time was the attempt to set

fire to one of the paper warehouses where a large store was kept. Although paper was not a key product in the German war economy, the quantity produced at this particular factory was very considerable when related to total output. The loss of a fully stocked warehouse would have had some repercussions in other sectors of the "war machine". A carefully prepared and timed attempt to get a blaze going was made by an Australian, supplied from outside the camp with the materials. The blaze started one evening as arranged; but just as it was getting a hold an Austrian worker, who by sheer coincidence and extremely bad luck had chosen that moment to smoke a cigarette outside the factory door, noticed the flames. He promptly raised the alarm and the fire was out in a very short time indeed.

A meticulous and thorough enquiry began, involving the Gestapo who rightly suspected arson. They made a very careful examination at the scene of the fire and then pounced on our camp. Every tin, bottle and container of every description was scrupulously examined and accompanied by vociferous protests from the prisoners, the place was turned upside down. The Gestapo were the people who terrorised so much of German-occupied Europe, who forced entry into people's homes in the early hours of the morning and hauled them away to an uncertain but terrible fate. It was strange to observe those dreaded men being told in a very emphatic way, to "knock it off" or "clear off" and that by prisoners!

Of course they did not clear off, but although they continued with their job, they clearly felt their authority was being challenged. They found nothing incriminating at all, but rather than let the matter drop altogether on purely circumstantial evidence, charged a prisoner with causing the fire.

It so happened that at the moment the fire started this unfortunate person was the only man reported absent from his place of work. He was in fact having a slightly longer meeting than usual with his girlfriend, but was an entirely innocent party as far as the fire was concerned. That was his bad luck. He had to appear before a court martial which, though unable to pin the crime on him decisively, probably felt unable to acquit him after Gestapo participation in the case. So as a kind of compromise they passed a light sentence of imprisonment. This was of course rather distressing to the real culprit, but obviously there could be no confession.

Such were the variety of ways in which different types of people let off steam. We all lived in a small, strange and restricted world but as Milton said "The Mind is its own place and in itself can make a Heav'n of Hell, a Hell of Heav'n".

A quite different incident that primarily concerned me led to an astonishing series of consequences. By that time many prisoners had acquired some knowledge of the German language and could make themselves understood to a small extent. But this knowledge was obtained from working

Thank You Note from Hon. Secretary:

When Ken Jorgenson “marched out” I was left pondering the future of “Kibbles Post”.

Fortunately the Boaz family in the shape of Keith (our lamented Late President), Cheryl Lawson (Keith’s daughter) and Greg Frith (Keith’s business friend) came to the rescue.

In particular I am and shall remain eternally grateful to Cheryl.

She is a talented, calm and efficient Editor who ensures we have an efficient, eminently readable “newsyletter”, which is published on time despite any problems (which can be many at times).

Cheryl, the Regiment salutes you and thanks you. Keith will be smiling.

From the Editor, Cheryl Lawson:

Upon John’s insistence I have included the above and would like to say thank you for your kind words but I consider it an honour and privilege to be the current “Editor” of “Kibbles Post”.

Since taking over from my Dad, Keith Boaz, I have enjoyed immensely the task of reading and putting together the various stories that have been related by the members and their families of the 2/1st Field Regiment – I have laughed, I have cried and I have been incredibly proud and humbled by what these men (young boys some of them) went through so that we, their descendents, can live in the country we do today.

Whilst there are stories to tell and people who wish to read them, and until the last soldier of the 2/1st Field Regiment “marches out”, I hope we can continue to bring you “Kibbles Post”.