



The Germ Journal



Issue Number: 32
31 March 2009

Welcome to the March 2009 Edition of the Germ Journal (the Ex-104 Battery Member's Newsletter).

This Edition of the Germ Journal, sent in hardcopy, has been sponsored by Peter Martin of St Arnaud Vic.

Vale:

John Warwick Downes
17/11/1940 – 05/04/2009

Sadly I have to report the passing of John Downes. John was a Sergeant with 104 Bty's First Tour. I understand John had been ill for a while and at this time I do not have any more details. I will endeavour to have a Eulogy for John prepared for the June Edition of the Germ.

Contact List Updates:

If any Germ has an E-mail address that is not recorded on the Contact List please let me know (corcorf@bigpond.net.au). It will save time and money if all I have to do is mail out electronically.

New/Change of address, etc.: -

Please update your Contact Lists accordingly.

Email/address changes;

It looks like Ernie and Doreen Bryon are back from China. New email and phone numbers are

E-Mail: bryon3537@hotmail.com

Phone: 02 9252 7112 Mobile 0458 828 562.

Rod George has a new email address

E-Mail: rodgeorge@optusnet.com.au

Welcome aboard to;

12 Field Regiment RAA Association:

The Annual General Meeting was held on 6 March 2009 and the following members were elected to their respective positions unopposed;

President, John Sullivan
Vice President, Rob Costello
Secretary, John Allen
Treasurer, John Beer
Committee, G Collins, R Cranna, A Forsdike, T Marshall, G Ryland and K Scrimshaw.

The latest recipients of the Army Combat Badge are;

R W Alexander, M L Austin, P J Croke, L A Davenport, A L Galland, A G Guest,
K L Marsden, V J Page, E J Shea, G R Soper and B J Twomey

Australian Artillery Association:

No Report this Quarter

National Artillery Museum at North Fort, North Head:

Mick Crawford and the few volunteers he has could do with some assistance if any Germs have the time. I'm sure he would love to hear from you.

Reunions:

ANZAC Day 2010

Bob Eddington reports;

Reunion 2010 Darwin, we have been able to lock in the prices for the accommodation at Free Spirit Resort Darwin. We now have 45 booked into the cabins, 8 into the caravan sites and 4 in private accommodation. In total 57 have booked.

Those who are still undecided about coming to the Reunion please book anyway as the deposit you pay is fully refundable up to 1 month from the booked date. By doing this it will at least ensure that you have secured your accommodation as the availability of suitable places in Darwin are very limited. Do not forget to use the booking code "Anzac 2010" and book only by phone. After you have booked please contact me so that we can keep a track of who is coming.

Looking forward to seeing you all at Darwin next year.

Regards to all.

Bob Eddington
Organising Committee Darwin 2010.

ANZAC Day 2009

The Group of Germs that normally travel to a different Capital City each year decided to have a year off in 2009. This would enable them to have a Day at their own RSL Clubs for a change and also build up the coffers for the Darwin Reunion in 2010.

In Rosie and Rob Brooker's News you will see they are planning to have ANZAC Day in Bendigo with Frank Flegg. I'm sure they would welcome any one else who would like to share the day.

Quite separately, Paula and I plan to have the day in Marysville, the little town where the Black Saturday Bushfire did so much damage. Nick and Judy Jans live in Marysville and you may have seen them on TV post the fire. Nick informed me that a bumper Anzac Day is planned in Marysville this year and the only institution at Pucapunyal wants to give maximum support and make it big 'flagship' event. If it does go ahead and Nick thinks it will, even though the village itself is in very sad circumstances right now, it will illustrate the Anzac spirit in spades. Just what Victorians need at the moment. It would be great to have some of the Germs alongside Nick on ANZAC Day. I refer you to Nick's SITREP in his News below.

Items of Interest:

Contributions from around the country follow.

Barry and Glenda Basham's News: -

Hi!

It seems like just yesterday that we had the last Germ Journal, I guess not too much has happened since we last touched base.

As we write we are busy packing and tomorrow we are off! Firstly stopping over at Sydney as Glenda's sister is being remarried and from there we are heading to Forster. We have rented a holiday unit and we will spend a month there catching up with family.

The fishing rods are packed and the palate is really looking forward to feasting on seafood, so we're ready! Still really dry in this neck of the woods be great to see some rain!

Cheers to all, hope you have a great Easter!

The Basho's

Rob and Rosemary Brooker's News: -

Rob and I talked to Jacko last week about spending Anzac time in Bendigo this year in Frank Flegg's territory. We are going to Adelaide for 2 weeks in April and will then drive to Bendigo on either the 23rd or 24th April for a few days.

We have booked accommodation at the Comfort Inn Shamrock, formally known as the Shamrock Hotel, corner Pall Mall and Williamson St, Bendigo, VIC, 3550 phone 03 5443 0333. Jacko and Kath have already checked it out and given their recommendation. It is classified by the National Trust and details are on their website

<http://www.hotelshamrock.com.au/Pages/Location.aspx>

NRMA Members have an option to get a continental breakfast or 10% discount on the tariff, so this may also apply to the Motoring Associations in the other States. Parking is \$6 on weekdays and free on weekends in the secure Council Carpark across the road.

I am not sure who is planning to go at this stage, but hope to see you all in Bendigo. Apparently there is another group staying at the hotel and there were only 14 rooms left when we booked last week.

Pieter and Gay Leembruggen came to visit us on Wednesday and we had a lovely evening with them. They are planning to go to Bendigo too.

Regards to all,

Rob and Rosemary

Frank and Paula Corcoran's News: -

I waxed down the surfboard recently and we headed for the Sunshine Coast for a few days. It was not too bad with the oil slick and dodging containers, lost overboard, can be dangerous. Then on to the Conrad Treasury Casino in Brisbane for another few days to give the tables a fright. It's a great life when you can just decide to get away without having to plan too much.

Nadia is at home between contracts so the cat did not have to be boarded. We also had someone to take us to the airport and pick us up, probably saved about \$400 to start with. Nadia starts on Cockatoo Island (Off the NW Shelf) in a couple of weeks. They are mining Iron Ore from the seabed, which is something a bit different. She is lucky to have work as the work in the Resources Sector has shrunk considerably and she has some mates that are out of work.

We have been pretty quiet the last couple of months had 8 days in Adelaide in January so Paula could catch up with her girlfriends (5 of them spent 3 years touring Europe and the UK living in the back of a chartreuse Kombi Van in the late 60s). As you can imagine they are pretty close and life's a hoot when they get together. There is only one husband who was around when the globetrotting went on, as the rest of us met our brides post that era. But, we all get along fine. The girls have decided that they are going to go to Tasmania together in September and try and relive those glory days. They have commandeered Nadia's holiday house in Bicheno for week, I must put it in my diary to warn the locals.

My siblings all live in Queensland (I'm a Queenslander by birth) and my Sister's husband works for Rio Tinto and is currently working in Kuching in the State of Sarawak in Malaysia. I saw him in Brisby when we were there before he returned to Kuching and he wants us to visit, so we will have to give it some thought.

Alert Readers will recall that fellow Germ Barry West and I grew up in Woomera and when called up for National Service we coincidentally served in 104 Battery. Woomera was established after the WW11 and we are currently looking to have an Honour Board established at our old school, Woomera Area School, for Veterans of all post WW11 conflicts. It is a big task but we think it is worth it and the total to date number, 22 ex-students for Vietnam, which includes a Military Medal Recipient and one that was

Mentioned in Dispatches. To date we have only one ex-student from other post WW11 Conflicts, an Iraq Veteran, but we are hoping that if there are any more they will come forward over the next few months, as we have advertised widely through ESO Magazines.

As an interesting aside KJ Scarce, ex Navy and now Governor of SA, was enrolled at the Woomera School in July 1957 at the age of 5. Woomera is recorded in his Biography however the School is not, suggesting that he may not have been at the School very long. It does not matter, 1 week or 11 years it is all the same to me.

Well that's our news for now. Keep safe

Paula and Frank

Dick Duane's News: -

Giddy Frank and Greetings Germs and Gems,

Really looking forward to seeing all in Darwin. Have been retired now a touch over 3 years and am earning more than when I had a business with 5 full time employees.

Health wise? Well had to give up the cigs. The Specialist said I had only 50% lung capacity for an average person my age. Still a packet or more a day since age 16/17 and I'm still living. Just goes to show you don't ever know what is going to kill ya.

Still going to the gym 3 times a week. Feeling 100% better than 3 years ago and I recommend the Heart Health Programme with the VVCS to all.

Flood, remember the time you drove us back to Ingleburn from Liverpool in your U Beut Torana and I had to have a Chunder and the passenger window was up? Did I ever apologise, don't remember. Another time there were a few of us and a carton of beer appeared so we all went to the gunners car park and gathered up a few fallen branches, etc and had a Bon Fire. Well it was winter!

That's it from me. Hope everybody is in good health. Enjoy the coming Anzac Day festivities and I will see you all in Darwin.

Dick.

Graham and Judy Floyd's News: -

Hi Frank and Paula,

Hope you are both well. The Diary extracts (attached) may be of interest to some older Germs. It's a pity that there does not appear to be a Commander's Diary Extract from Jack Kelly.

A detailed reading certainly unlocks some hidden memories (not sure if that is good or otherwise!).

We are still enjoying life, which is the main thing.

UBIQUE

Graham and Judy Floyd

Phil and Rosemarie Garland's News: -

Phil is trying to make a list of all Fire Support Bases from both Tours by 104 Bty.

He has all of the 1st Tour, so if someone from the 2nd Tour could help him out and give him the number and list by name of the Fire Support Bases from that Tour, it would be appreciated

Rod and Sandra George's News: -

A few things are happening with us, our number 1 child Belinda and her Husband Chris are due to have their first child (our first grandchild) around the 5th April. This is a major thing for our family group. The only thing I can qualify at this stage is that they having a boy.

The Boss and I are travelling to Melbourne to attend the Avalon Airshow, weekend of the 15th -16th March 2009. On Invitation, I was flying my own plane and my pal jacked up with having to pay for half the fuel and opted out, (it only uses 77 litres an hour, with flying time each way around about 3.2 hours) so Jetstar is the saviour. I intend to be at the Sydney March (as last year). I just hope and pray (already) that it does not rain. Dennis Gorricks will be in Sydney as well, so we are sure of two spots and a few cold beers later or first or at both ends.

My plane is doing the overfly of the Wollongong and Shell Harbour Marches with a mate flying it as usual, so that I can be at the main march.

Not a lot more, life goes on (thank God for that).

Take exceptional care all you Germs and Germettes.

Rod and Sandra George.

Murray (Wes) and Hellen Hall's News: -

Hello to You All,

Everything in the West is going OK, except we don't seem to have started the footy season very well. Oh well its early days.....

Hellen and I would like to wish you all a Happy Easter. Hope the Easter Bunny leaves you some Chocolate, or are you like us these days, to busy buying things for the grandchildren. Perhaps they will share some of their eggs with you.

We would also like to say how hard it was to watch the Bush Fires and to think of those who might have been affected.

We think of Sooty, who we know would have been helping. I saw Nick Jans on one of the reports and he had prepared well for such an event as a Fire Storm.

All the Best from the West.

Hellen and Wes

Chicka and Vicki Hayden's News: -

I have heard from Vicki and Chicka they had just gone home from Burrum Heads to secure everything in the likely event that Cyclone Hamish came south to their neck of the woods. They were also concerned about their caravan down at Burrum Heads and may have had to move the Van away from the river or cut the holiday short and go back home full stop. I guess we will hear it all in due course.

Nick and Judy Jan's News: -

As I mentioned above Nick gave me a SITREP that I received on 25/2/2009, 18 days after Black Saturday and it follows;

Hi All,

Thanks so very much for your messages of support, they were much appreciated.

On-line services have just been restored, and hundreds of messages came up - many of them concerning the fires.

One way that it has affected me is that it has completely bugged up my sleeping patterns. So this is being written (dictated, actually) in the early hours of the morning. It's probably going to be a bit rambling.

I'm sending it, not just to all the members of the class of 64, but essentially also to anybody with a military connection on my address list. Apologies for not answering everyone individually, but I hope you understand. Life has been incredibly busy and am about to have my first few days off this month.

Executive summary: as you know, we are both okay, the house is okay, the cat is okay, the garden is bugged, the car is gone; but we are a hell of a lot better than most of the poor devils who were our neighbors going about ordinary business less than three weeks ago.

Marysville is the worst affected village in the region: only 14 houses left standing out of about 900, and 40 or more deaths out of about 650.

It all happened in a matter of moments, and it was all over in about three hours. Apparently it was the most severe firestorm ever recorded anywhere and we were lucky enough to be right on the front line!

Fortunately, we had been preparing for this day for about a decade and the prospect of not staying and defending the place never occurred to us. We had a good defence system, a good defensive plan, we were well trained and we kept our heads.

All that stuff I learned all those decades ago brought to the fore!

Actually, if there is any credit due from me, it is simply because I married the right woman 20 years ago. Judy had been preparing for The Day since she designed and supervised the building of the house over 10 years back. I simply followed orders, as my twin careers of professional soldier and a married man had taught me to do. (No, really.) Quite rightly, Judy has been swamped even in the last few days by individuals and teams from various agencies who are eager to know 'how she did it'. I don't imagine this is going to slow down too much, as the Royal Commission swings into train.

But here is my initial summary of the situation.

Principle number 1: site your defences in a defensible position. Tucked into the hill, made of stone, an expensive but very effective watering system around the house and within the garden, a big green cool garden, etc.

Principle number 2: prepare for the eventuality. Two or three years ago, the Country Fire Authority offered the community on-site training, where the CFA would come to your house, make an on the spot assessment of your vulnerabilities and give you some simple advice as to what you can do to defend your home (as distinct from fighting bushfires, which is a whole different game -- and got bless them for doing it). Only about a dozen families in the village availed themselves of this opportunity. If this seems a little surprising to you, it's probably a manifestation of the old Australian attitude of 'she'll be right'. Anyway, the CFA advised us to buy portable firefighting kit, in the form of knapsack sprays, small fire extinguishers, extra buckets, mops, the right kind of clothing (very simply, long-sleeved cotton shirts and sturdy jeans and boots, plus -- and this is very important as it turned out -- miners' lamps for our foreheads) and so on. Also to clear away all the loose debris from around the house (leaves, garden clippings, and the like). You develop a checklist of things that you have to do if a fire contingency arises (the cars in the garage, fill up the buckets, etc). All just commonsense stuff.

Principle number 3: stay alert during the bush fire season. Of all the principles, this one is least in the rocket-science category. We had been told in the days leading up to what I believe is now being referred to as Black Saturday that conditions were developing at a dangerous level. The Saturday itself was quite hideous, with extraordinary temperatures approaching 50° in some of the country areas and very strong winds. Extraordinarily, it seems that many in the village did not consider the eventuality that we might be threatened. One simply monitors the website, stays tuned to the right radio stations, regularly keeps an eye on the situation outside, has a map to interpret the various information coming from public sources, keeps in touch with others in the village and in the area; again, all commonsense stuff.

Principle number 4: know what you have to do when it happens. We both had our assigned duties and we simply did them. We also had a simple command structure, which involved a leader (Judy) and a follower (the other member of the team). I have

learned over the years, and I mean this in all sincerity, that she is superb in tight situations and is much more likely to be thinking clearly compared to me.

Finally, I imagine we had a very large dollop of luck! (Although I do keep in mind Gary Player's dictum: the more I practice, the luckier I get).

As you are probably better aware than I, the region looks like some of those photos you see from Hiroshima or Dresden. Perhaps you've seen them on the media since. One of the kids just sent me this link -- <http://media.theaustralian.com.au/multimedia/2009/02/08-ferguson/index.html> -- There is a shot of Judy, at about the 3-minute mark. She is standing on the rubble of the cottage next door, which we owned. Fortunately unoccupied. Our 'real' house is beyond. There is another one of the house later in the presentation.

One of the few services that we still have to be restored is television (and I must say I don't miss it very much), so we haven't seen the kind of coverage that was available to almost everybody else. It seems to have affected people very deeply.

When we awoke the following morning, after a restless night of taking turns to nap on the couch, I didn't want to go outside, because I knew -- or I thought I knew -- what I would see. It was actually hugely more awful than I had anticipated and it was not surprising that when we visited some of the few remaining survivors down at the village cricket pitch (the gathering point for people who have had to evacuate their homes -- the large bulk of those who did so left in a hurried convoy late on Saturday afternoon) the poor buggers were quite shell-shocked. I imagine I was myself.

The media were allowed in -- or to put it more accurately, were not excluded -- on the morning after and Judy appeared on many TV coverages and Australian newspapers. Someone told us that they had seen a reference to her on CNN, so it is possible that you saw her without recognising who she was (she was the beautiful one). Since then, the place has been in lockdown -- eg, movement in and out subject to having a pass and certainly no media -- while the forensics people and the coroner continue to hunt for further casualties. We expect this to go on for at least another fortnight or so.

There are a couple of dozen of other residents who elected to stay after the fire, in homes that were habitable and we continue to live a rather weird existence. We had a 'we-survived' party last Friday night, at the only tavern that survived, and it was great.

The water services were restored in the middle of the first week afterwards and the electricity a little over a week after that, along with mobile phones and then landlines (hundreds of messages there too!). Finally, this afternoon, the broadband network was restored. We can now gradually re-immense ourselves in 'real life'.

Needless to say, I haven't given thought to much other than cleaning up and the recovery process and certainly not to any professional activities. However, since I have volunteered my managerial and leadership services to the small group of citizens who is able to begin thinking about the strategic implications of rebuilding -- and they are absolutely huge -- it may be some time before a real-life situation can be restored!

As some of you know, I have increasingly been drifting into various forms of scholarship and research in the last few decades, most of it concerning the Australian military. I am just aching to return to my contemplations and books; but another part of me feels compelled to pitch in, offer my abilities (these are comparatively modest by the standards of the contemporary Australian Army, but are somewhat better honed than those of the average citizen locally – well, you'd bloody hope so!) to the recovery process. There is also the little matter of resuming my modest income!

This has become much longer than I intended and I will wind up now. More later perhaps. It is very cathartic to write. Please phone if you feel inclined.

Once again, old comrades, your response has touched me more deeply than I can say. Don't worry about me; I am one of the lucky ones, with a house, a career, an intact family, and even a choice of meaningful and purposeful activities in the immediate and long term. So many of my friends here in the district are quite substantially disadvantaged in most of those factors. I can't begin to imagine what they are going through.

Final note: our old institution has been terrific in the speed and effectiveness of its response, with an excellent cookhouse and bath platoon down at the football pitch to support all of the wonderful 'ordinary Australians' in various professional functions who have come in to help us; and not least in Major-General John Cantwell who is the temporary head of the reconstruction authority and will be its chief of operations in a few days time. He toured the area last weekend in the company of the mining entrepreneur, Andrew Forrest and I was hugely impressed by how quickly he was able to grasp the operational and cultural issues and to win the trust of everybody with whom he came in contact, from the top to the bottom.

Everybody here has been enormously moved by the national and international response to this, with support of all sorts pouring in. As noted in my first e-mail, we are only dimly aware of this, having been cut off from the world in the immediate aftermath; but it is mind-boggling, really.

The response from both the authorities and the citizenry was prompt, efficient, sympathetic and competent. It makes you proud to be an Australian, really.

Cheers

Nick and Judy

Pieter and Gay Leembruggen's News: -

G'Day Frank, Paula and the rest of the Germ Clan,

Gay and I spent a few days in Canberra early this year and visited the new exhibitions at the War Memorial, which are absolutely stunning. The models are so realistic; it's creepy. And listening to a radio operator calling for artillery fire brought back memories of signals in 104. We also visited the new Portrait Gallery, which is incredibly interesting. Both venues are really worth a look for anyone visiting our capital.

But the highlight of the trip was a day with Rob and Rosemary Brooker and family at their comfortable residence in outer Canberra. It was a stinking hot day, but the air-

conditioning worked well, the beer was perfectly chilled, the wine was first-rate, the BBQ expertly cooked, the Pavlova sumptuous, the company jovial and we just had one fabulous day.

Since then, we are encountering a change in life experience as I have gone back to work part time. It was supposed to only be 2 days a week, but somehow became 4!!! This only started three weeks ago, so it is a real shock to the system, but good for the retirement fund, which has taken a fair beating of late. I have also taken up mentoring small business people on a voluntary basis through the local Business Development Centre, which is most rewarding. Some of these people are really doing it tough with the current downturn.

We recently spoke with two lots of friends who narrowly escaped perishing in Victoria's bushfires. Both families drove away as their homes exploded in flames, one lot driving through a fence into a paddock that had just burnt out and the others racing both their cars through flames in their driveway to get out. They were terrified and lost everything, but thankfully survived without any burns. It's sad to see them start from scratch again at this time in life, particularly as they are seniors.

In the belief we are still retired, Gay and I set off to her brother's new home in Wangaratta for a four-day weekend, driving up to beautiful Bright, Beechworth and Mt Buffalo. You can see how close the fires came to Beechworth and why they were seriously considering evacuation. Apart from that, these areas are spectacular in autumn as the leaves change colour. We ran out of time to visit Rutherglen's wineries, so that will be a priority next time, but I did have to get back to work.

Our next trip is to Bendigo when we catch up with some of you lot. See you then.

Cheers,

Pieter and Gay

Greg and Barb Petersen's News: -

Hello Frank,

We have just returned from our wonderful holiday. Started with three days in Adelaide then boarded the Ghan and headed for Darwin. A short stopover at Port Augusta and then on to The Alice where we had a tour of the town by bus and then visited some wonderful Art Galleries where paintings by Albert Namatjira were on display.

Next stop over was Katherine Gorge where we did a boat trip up two of the gorges. Our country is so diverse and beautiful. Had a week in Darwin, visited Litchfield National Park, fed fish, did a boat trip to see the crocodiles being fed, visited more Art Galleries and Museums and did a tour through the East Point Military Museum. A great holiday, but it is always good to be home. Back in the real world again where life goes on as usual.

Greg's main interest is his greyhounds and exercising them everyday. We still mind our young grandson two days per week, which is a joy.

Hoping all our friends are safe and well and will be thinking of you all on Anzac Day, where ever you may be.

Greg and Barb.

Kevin and Denise Scrimshaw's News: -

I would like to begin by congratulating John Sullivan for his new role as President of 12th Field Regiment (Vietnam) Association and John Allen, back as Secretary. Grahame Collins and myself are the 104 Bty representatives and even though Dick Gray is the 102 Bty representative he was also in 104 Bty. Not a bad representation.

Our thoughts are with anyone who may have been affected by the fires down south, and not to forget the floods up north. One photo in the Daily Telegraph was of a Vietnam Veteran and retired Federal police officer (Bernie Hansell), with his wife at Kinglake. The photo shows what is left of their home (with the Australian flag still flying) and the burnt remains of his service medals.

On Saturday the 9th May Grahame and Carol Collins and Denise and myself will be having a 40th Anniversary of the first tour's return from Vietnam dinner. We haven't decided the venue yet but there is an open invitation to anyone (plus Partners) who would like to join us. Please contact either Grahame or myself. We are also open to suggestions on type of dinner, BBQ or restaurant and the area. If there are no takers we will still do it ourselves. We hope that people in other areas around Australia do the same.

We will be thinking of everyone on ANZAC Day and have a drink to toast the Battery.

The Scrimmies.

Barry and Sue West's News: -

Over the last few months, the Wests have been taking the opportunity to do some renovations to the much neglected garden and adding a coat of paint and some new carpet to a few rooms in the house. Daughter Christine, new son-in-law and grandson have now settled down to their new home in Darwin, but sounds like David will be spending a few months in the bush. Susan and I are off to Darwin in early April for about two and a half weeks, celebrating grandson Oliver's 9th birthday. Should be back in cooler Canberra a few days before Anzac Day. For those who may be interested, the Vietnam Veterans Association of Australia (VVAA) will be holding it's National Congress in Canberra on Thursday 21 and Friday 22 May this year at the Quality Hotel, Dickson (next to the "Tradies" Club). Visitors are welcome on both days to find out what your Association does for you.

Frank will no doubt say more on the Woomera Area School Honour Board, but to date we have 22 Vietnam veterans and one Iraq veteran on our list. Not bad for a li'l ol' country town in outback South Aust.

Wishing you all a safe and happy Easter break, and take it easy on Anzac Day fellas.

Barry and Sue

Remember When:

This is a new section of the Germ Journal and it has been inspired by the tall stories that come out at our get togethers. Any Germs that have a like story for future Editions please feel free to contact me and you will be heard.

Sick Parade:

Please let me know if you are aware of anyone who is not well. As I have said previously, a phone call out of the blue and from an old friend could quite easily be the best medicine.

General:

I received the following article from John Thornton in regard to an initiative put forward by the Associate Editor of the New Zealand Sunday Star Times, Ms Monique Farmer;

TOGETHER THEN, TOGETHER NOW THE SPIRIT OF ANZAC

On 11 March 2009 Alan Price received the letter shown below via Bill Hardman, a former 4RAR member who is now a counsellor with the NSW RSL. Ms Monique Farmer, the Associate Editor of the New Zealand Sunday Star Times, sent the original letter to Don Rowe, the President of the NSW RSL. Bill Hardman then rang Alan, as they were already involved together in another project.

Dear Don,

Thanks very much for your time on the phone today.

As discussed, we are planning a very special story for Anzac Day 2009, a national celebration of a very important date. We are keen to find an Australian and a New Zealander who fought/worked together in either Vietnam or Korea, who perhaps kept in touch for a while but over the years have lost contact and are keen to be reunited. It will be a powerful way for us to cover themes of the Anzac spirit of mateship and the bonds between Australians and New Zealanders. The reunion story will appear on the cover of one of our sections on April 19, in-depth interviews with both men on their lives, their experiences together, the bonds and memories they share.

We have secured Pacific Blue as an airline partner, and they will fly the veteran and a friend to New Zealand for the interviews/photographs, plus we will sort accommodation and other expenses. We will also be aiming to get some TV and other media coverage of the reunion.

The Sunday Star Times is a broadsheet national newspaper with a readership of nearly 600,000. It has the biggest reach of the Sunday newspapers in New Zealand and is a quality publication. It is probably most like the Sunday Age in look and feel, or the Saturday Sydney Morning Herald (where I worked for the last 17 years before moving to NZ, and why I called RSL NSW first!).

From the veteran story, we will then launch a competition for our readers where they can win a chance to be reunited with a long-lost mate across the Tasman - work colleague, childhood friend, sweetheart, family member. Undoubtedly there will be other great human interest stories that come from these trips.

I hope this is an adequate summary of what we have in mind. I really hope you can help us find a veteran who will enter into the spirit of this idea and has a great story to tell.

I look forward to hearing back from you.

All the best,

Monique Farmer

Alan replied to Bob with the story below and Bob suggested that Alan contact Monique. Alan sent the following story to her.

Dear Monique,

My name is Alan Price and I am the President of the 4th Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment (4RAR) Association, Queensland, Australia. My battalion served two tours in South Vietnam accompanied by the New Zealanders of Victor and Whiskey Companies RNZIR. We were officially called 4RAR/NZ (ANZAC).

I have heard from Don Rowe about your gracious offer via your email and submit the following for your consideration.

2Lt Reg Swarbrick, an Aussie, was the platoon commander of a combined Aussie and Kiwi Pioneer Platoon, Support Company, 4RAR/NZ (ANZAC) in South Vietnam from May 1971 to December 1971.

Approximately twelve months ago his former Sergeant, Tim Mangakahia, a Kiwi and Maori rang me and asked if I had a contact address for his old platoon commander, Reg Swarbrick. Tim had been searching for Reg on a casual basis for over thirty five years without success but finally was driven to conducting an all out search for his old boss and mate. Apparently they worked so well together that Tim Mangakahia wanted to restore his old friendship with Reg. In the meantime, Reg was looking for Tim in New Zealand without success.

I did not have Reg Swarbrick registered as a member at the time and spent approximately four weeks searching for him. I finally learned that he may have gone to New Zealand and it was thought that he may be working for The Athletes Foot chain of footwear stores, somewhere in New Zealand. After searching the white pages in New Zealand I finally found Reg who informed me that he had been searching for Tim in New Zealand. I then passed contact details to both Reg and Tim and they spoke on the phone after some thirty seven years. I believe that a few tears flowed. Tim was crying when he rang me to thank me. I believe that I slept quite well that night! They have been in constant contact ever since but have not seen each other.

The irony of the story is that Tim the Kiwi, had moved to and is living in Queensland, Australia and Reg the Aussie, had moved to and is living in Christchurch, New Zealand. Not only that but one week prior to me discovering Reg, he had been in Brisbane, Queensland on a business trip, thus the delay in being able to contact him. If only I had been a little bit quicker on my toes!

I would recommend that these two gentlemen be considered for the award and what a wonderful gesture on the part of the Sunday Star Times?

I have not contacted either Mr Mangakahia or Mr Swarbrick about this. I realise that there are others that are equally worthy of this award but I believe that this story is remarkable in itself.

Highest regards,

Alan

The good news is that Reg and Tim won the competition and Tim and his wife Ailsa, were flown to Auckland on Thursday 02 April to reunite their friendship with Reg and his family courtesy of the New Zealand Sunday Star Times and the teamwork of the NSW RSL and the 4 RAR Association, Qld. They were wine and dined on Thursday night, and were involved in interviews on Friday and Tim and Ailsa returned to Australia today, Saturday 04 April.

The 4 RAR Association, Qld sent a copy of the book "The Fighting Fourth" to Monique for background research and the story of Reg and Tim will be published in the New Zealand Sunday Star Times on 19 April (www.sstlive.co.nz). Monique also intends to send the story to the Sydney Morning Herald. There will also be a story on them presented on New Zealand TV on the current affairs program called Close Up on Friday 17 April.

In the words of Bill Hardman when it was announced that Reg and Tim had won the competition, "Isn't it amazing how things work out. A string of circumstances with a result that will remind the public of what the true spirit of ANZAC is all about."

This story also appears on our website at: www.4rarassociationsaustralia.com and the feature article will be shown on the site on approximately Monday 20 April.

This story would have been of particular interest to the Germans that served with "V" and "W" Companies over the Battery's 2 Tours.

Next Edition will be June 2009 and all the tall stories from ANZAC Day can be relived in print.

Up the Ol' Red Rooster.

Frank Corcoran