



SURVEY EX-SERVICEMEN'S ASSOCIATION SOUTH AUSTRALIA



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Newsletter No 48 - August 2008

WELCOME

Welcome to the second newsletter for 2008. Thanks again to those members who have sent articles and photos. It is only with your support that we can continue to publish our newsletter. I have articles for our next edition from some regular contributors but I have room for more so why not put pen to paper with a tall tale from the past.

HOUSEKEEPING

Two requests from the Committee
Please send:

- Changes to personal information, name, address, phone number or email to the Secretary
- Financial transactions to the Treasurer

There has been a growing trend over recent time to pass money and change of address to any member of the Committee expecting it to be passed to the appropriate person.

SOCIAL NEWS

First Friday Drinks

At the Saracens Head Hotel in Carrington St CBD at 5pm each first Friday of the month. Why not drop in and enjoy the company of fellow ex-RASvy members.

PEOPLE NEWS

John Hunter

John disappeared from the Adelaide scene several years ago, with not a single rumour or report of his movements since then although he still rates the odd mention during conversation at our First Friday meetings. In early August Alex Cairney solved the mystery, reporting that he had met John in Brisbane by sheer chance only a few days before. It seems John had lived in Canada for some time, but has now retired and lives on the Gold Coast. A bit brief on specifics, but Alex might have talked him into attending the Fortuna Association function in Bendigo next September, so perhaps there could be more news later.

Barry Lutwyche

Barry made his second visit to Adelaide this year in mid July, but only for a brief stay to visit relatives he was unable to see during his short but hectic visit last April for Anzac Day. It was a

pleasure to see Barry again, if only for a few hours, but he did manage to see Stevo Hinic and have lunch with Alex Munro before returning to Brisbane

Bob Ballard

Bob and Pam are currently enjoying a well earned break as they take a 10 week around the world holiday. They have been visiting family and friends in England and have sent a couple of photo's for inclusion in our next newsletter. They were next heard of cruising up the Inside Passage in Alaska. Enjoy your trip Bob.

Neville Stone

Neville sent an apology for the AGM because he and Diane are on a holiday in the USA. It must be the travel season or is it just wanting to escape the Adelaide winter?

NEWS ITEMS

Annual General Meeting

The AGM will be held on Monday 1 September at 8pm in the Conference Room HQ 9 Bde Keswick Barracks (the old 4 Fd Svy Bldg). A separate notice has been circulated to members.

Membership List

Stevo Hinic has suggested that we publish a list of Members and their contact details in our Newsletter so that members can more easily contact each other. Some members of the committee think it would be a good idea but we need your input. What do members think about having their details published? If it is published in each newsletter, should the street, suburb/town and phone number be included or should it be just suburb and phone number? Are there privacy issues that need to be discussed? A couple of members have responded to my last request but it is essential that you inform the committee of your thoughts.

Anzac Day Report 2008

As for previous years, another very agreeable Anzac Day parade and reunion was enjoyed by our members in fine and mild weather. Those who attended their local Dawn Service all reported that the crowd in attendance was larger than usual, which indicates that the media coverage of the Anzac tradition is being absorbed by everyone within the various community groups.

We were delighted to see old Corps identities visit us for the day, Alex Cairney and Barry Lutwyche from Brisbane and George Timmins from Swan Hill, who earlier in the day had attended the Dawn Service at the Cross of Sacrifice, in company with Mal Henderson from Gawler.

I was pleasantly surprised when I reached our form-up point, to find a good roll call of members already there by 9am, including Col. Simon Lemon down from Clare for the day, which for many gave time for an annual catch-up with old friends. John Scharber and Alex Cairney decided to forego the march and not tempt fate with the odd health issue, unlike Frank Bryant who has solved the problem using a flash red electric scooter. Alex brought a batch of purple berets with him, as worn by the Qld. Association on Anzac Day, and sold nine in quick time. I later heard that Alex was accosted during the morning by a group of frisky uniform loving matrons, wanting to know the history of the purple beret, and I'm willing to bet he loved every moment.

By my count thirty one members stepped off for the march (hopefully all on the left foot except Frank, and nine purple berets being worn) led by our WW2 elder member Bob Love and banner carrier Dave Irving, and perhaps for a first time ever, we completed the march without a halt although it was close at times.

The crowds lining the route seem to be bigger each year and are certainly enthusiastic in their support of the occasion and those marching, showing that the spirit of the Anzac tradition is as real as ever.

At the finish we gathered on the nearby lawns for the usual group photograph, with Joan Munro as the duty photographer, assisted by a couple of other shutterbugs with ever-ready cameras.

Dispersing after the march, most members visited the refreshment booths on Torrens Parade Ground as a half-way house enroute to our reunion, and although the place was crowded it gave an

opportunity to enjoy an ale with friends and acquaintances, so I was not surprised when I met so many that I formerly knew from other units. Chatting there within a small group, I was relating my adventures while having a flight in a hot air balloon near Strathalbyn, only to have Anthony Stephens go one better and declare himself a licenced balloon pilot and the proud owner of a hot air balloon. He also participates in the various balloon events held country wide and mentioned that former Corps members Danny Galbraith and John Stein are active balloonists, with Danny currently being the president of the Australian association. Just thought you might like to know. The venue for our reunion was again the Elephant Hotel, which opened at mid-day to provide the same private facilities as last year, except I was glad to see the lunch menu selection had been expanded, which was just as well because it wasn't long before all the dining tables were occupied and the place pretty well packed out with members and partners, making a very lively lunch group of around fifty or so. Steve McGuinness invited his parents along for the day, both on holidays from Melbourne, and I with others enjoyed their company. Our president, Bob Dikkenberg, kept formalities to a minimum when he welcomed all present and to announce that our AGM normally held each Anzac Day was postponed until next August, so not to interfere with the reunion. John Wicker had produced some transfers of the Corps badge in colour, suitable for transfer onto a hard and smooth surface like glass, which he sold during the afternoon for three dollars each, raising a tidy sum for our Association funds so well done John. He and Lea had travelled from Stansbury for the day. The time seemed to flit by as it does at reunions, so everyone by late afternoon had drifted downstairs and settled in the bar area to watch the remainder of the AFL game being played in Melbourne, to round off another enjoyable get-together. I left just after 4pm, about the same time as our interstate visitors Alex, Barry and George, headed out for a suburban RSL club capably led by Mal Henderson, and as I understand the GPO clock was not far from sounding midnight before they finally pulled stumps.

I certainly enjoyed the activities and company throughout the day and I'm sure all other members at the reunion would have also. As a point of interest for readers who were not able to attend I've included the names of everyone seen on the day, however, I know the list is missing some names including the ladies, so my apologies.

Neil Houston, Janet and Steve McGuinness, Alex Czornohalen, John Nathan, Graeme Ragless, George Timmins, Barry Lutwyche, Alex Cairney, Bob Love, Dave Irving, Eddie Jacobs, Bob Hunter, Darcy Patrick, Dave Collins, Peter Elverd, Lincoln Smith, Naomi and Frank Bryant, Bob Ballard, Lea and John Wicker, Mal Henderson, Pam and John Harrison, Victoria and Bob Mills, Simon Lemon, Barbara and Arthur Henson, Brett Knuckey, Bob Turnbull, Anthony Stephens, Joan and Alex Munro, Stevo Hinic, Ken Jeffery, Bob Cooper, Noel Sproles, Brett Knuckey, Jason Phillips, John Scharber, John Whitburn, Angelo Pantelidis, Bill Griggs, John Frith, Jim Dunn, Bob Dikkenberg, Jon Dean, Richard Crawford, Roger Bland, Mark Bates and others.

Alex Munro.

Bendigo Anzac Day Parade

Judyne and I were in Bendigo on holidays so I accepted an invitation to march with the Vietnam Veterans on Anzac Day. We formed up opposite the Bendigo TAFE and marched up Pall Mall to the RSL Hall where the formal ceremonies were held. The parade was led by the Honour Guard, followed by the Army, Air Force and Navy, Ex-Fortuna, Vietnam Veterans, Bendigo Ex-Service Women, Rats of Tobruk and National Servicemen's Associations. A number of community groups brought up the rear of the parade. There was a large contingent of Vietnam Vets and it was a pleasant surprise to meet George Graham and Terry Danger in the crowd. The Ex-Fortuna contingent under the command of Rhys De Laine was quite small this year as many of their members had travelled to Melbourne to bolster the numbers of 3rd Aust Fd Svy Coy (AIF) Assoc. Other familiar faces were Dave Lambton-Young, Doug Arman, John and Tracey Phillips, 'Budda' Ellis, and Stewart Thaxter.

Allan Adsett

Adelaide Students visit WW1 Battlefields in Europe

An article was published in the The Australian on April 14th which depicted St Peters College student Fergus McPharlin wearing a slouch hat with a Survey Corps Badge on the front. I have been in contact with the College and the slouch hat and badge belongs to Dr Rex Lipman who asked Fergus to wear it as a favour. Dr Philip Grutzner, Headmaster of St Peter's College, had been most kind and sent me a copy of the College Magazine that includes photos and a report on the tour.

'Letter To The Editor' ~ Editorial 10 July 08, Gold Coast Bulletin

forwarded by Alex Cairney

How unfortunate it is that it takes the sad death of a young Australian on active service overseas; in this case one of our own, Signaller Sean MacCarthy; to initiate media interest in conditions of service in our military and the way that retired servicemen (& women) and injured veterans have been treated by this and previous governments. For most service retirees on the Defence Retirement Benefits Scheme, their superannuation was taxed at source, ie when they were paying for it, and unlike other superannuation beneficiaries, they are taxed again on receipt. Their annual indexation is so low that compared with the community as a whole, their superannuation actually lessens each year instead of keeping par with average cost increases. Compare the 2% that retired servicemen recently got with the 6% politicians awarded themselves. Over the last ten years, Parliamentary Superannuation pensions have risen by 44%, the age pension by 38% and Commonwealth employees retirement benefits by 23 %.

Recent comparisons have revealed that most DFRDB beneficiaries now live below the established poverty level. Most DFRDB superannuants with no other income need to access normal old age social service benefits to try and make ends meet. Benefits for wounded and injured servicemen returned from combat in their country's service are also under attack. The bureaucratic hoops placed in the way of claimant veterans are enough to drive one to suicide, in fact some veterans have. Repatriation hospitals have been privatised and sold off, free pharmaceutical benefits as promised after WW 1 are no longer provided and the financial compensatory benefit for injury received serving or defending one's country gets less each year in real economic terms. Medical and dental treatment of injured veterans are provided by the normal community medical providers and at one stage quite recently it was difficult to find medical practitioners to accept veterans, as the reimbursement offered by the government was insufficient to cover their costs. Fortunately this was sorted out conveniently just before the last election.

It is not as though governments are unaware of this. Veterans and servicemen have been telling them for years. There have been five reviews of servicemen's superannuation, each one coming to the same conclusion and offering the same advice on how to fix the problems. Each review has been ignored and the present government's only response has been to order a sixth review. Most politicians have no idea at all of what service life entails and are unable to even recognize that the serviceman and woman gives the government a blank cheque on enlistment to use their lives as they will in the service of the nation. There are no unions, there are no working hours and conditions of service are changed at the stroke of a pen with no "worker input" to managerial and personnel decision making. Our current crop of politicians seem to feel that being killed or wounded in action in the service of one's people equates to little more than an industrial accident and should be treated accordingly. Many of their so called "advisers" appear to have the same view.

Unfortunately it was not just Mr Billson who performed dismally at DVA. None of his predecessors were up to the mark, some were just worse than others. If these people had done their job, the veterans' community would not be so upset today. Overall, considering the resources received, the DVA does a good job, better in fact than its equivalents in Britain and the USA. However, Australia is a rich country and we can and should provide our servicemen and veterans a life of dignity and relative comfort when they leave government employ.

DVA Minister Alan Griffin appears to be listening, but servicemen and women, service superannuants and veterans expect him to act. The problem is well known and its correction is well overdue. Politicians can have their photos taken with departing soldiers and airmen as often as they like, but this will have little effect on solving current recruiting and service problems. Until superannuation and war injury benefit problems are satisfactorily resolved, no servicemen, currently serving or in retirement, is going to endorse a career in Australia's military to the young of this nation.

JJ Goold, Mudgeeraba QLD 4213

MEMBERS CONTRIBUTIONS

The True Story - Adelaide to Darwin 1957

Preamble

Several of us arrived in Adelaide following our recent graduation as surveyors from the Balcombe based 9/56 Basic Survey Course conducted over the period May '56 to May '57, - graduates Alex Munro and Peter Brunt, (Dux of the course if I recollect!), both having secured a valued 'home' posting, Bill Love (originally from Canberra), 'Mick' Thompson (from Queensland), and myself from Victoria. The remainder of the 9/56 graduates had also secured 'home postings', - Jim Skates and Kon Tsakolas to WA (Western Command), Jim Steadman (a veteran WW-II RAAF navigator), and Bruce Leigh-Cooper to NSW (Eastern Command), - in all a graduation of only nine after a start number of nearly thirty! The non-stayers who opted out for a variety of reasons, - lack of interest/capability, etc ended up as drivers, draughtsmen, or opted for other Army trades. Incidentally I ran into one of the non-graduates in PNG nearly twenty years later running a trade store cum crocodile farm, but that's another story!

Anyway, - we had heard on the 'grape-vine' from the course immediately before ours, having mostly been posted to Queensland, taking sometimes weeks to cut down one of many rain-forest trees when clearing hills for triangulation observations. Alarmed at this effort we quickly, - after consulting our basic school atlas and learned that South Australia was described as having "generally low, flat hills, and hardly any heavy timber" which seemed a safe bet for a posting! Accordingly five of the graduating class opted for South Oz' and were (surprisingly) allocated our choice. We should have been suspicious but then A week or so later we arrived at the Adelaide railway station after an overnight trip on the 'Overland', - were met by SSgt Jim Stokes who congratulated us on our "*sense of duty, - having volunteered to assist the (then) C Comd Fd Svy Sect in their six-year mapping programme in the NT*". Talk about having leapt 'out of the frying pan ' Pretty soon after arriving at Keswick' we were at the Q Store being fitted out with our tropical kit, - shorts, safari jackets, tropical 'jamas, puttees, long socks (the Army insisted on calling them stockings!), etc for our six month sojourn in the NT. All of our superfluous kit, - winter battle-dress, long summer uniforms, etc would, for the single chaps, be left suitably moth-balled in the Sect Q Store! Those members who 'lived out', Peter - married, and Alex - single who lived with his parents, had to make their own arrangements.

Even to us 'green-horns' it was obvious that Maj J K Nolan was going to enjoy himself on this, his expected, last field trip. He must have had some knowledge that following the '57 trip he was to be posted to the Regiment! Even with our limited knowledge of the country the schedule for the journey Adelaide to Darwin was, to say very generous with adequate opportunities for sight-seeing both on the trip up, and the subsequent field activities in the Darwin/Pine Creek area. Five-day weeks with the other two being accumulated and to be taken upon our return to Adelaide was a bonus!

To prepare us for our departure from Adelaide the nominated drivers, (I was unlicensed and therefore a passenger), were shown the correct/authorised route out of Adelaide to the north, - ANZAC Highway, West Terrace, Hindley Street, left on Montefiore Road and over the North Terrace WW-II 'Bailey' bridge, up Montefiore Hill, along Palmer and Brougham Places, O'Connell Street, Main North Road, and then onto the Port Wakefield Road, and then Darwin, - tally ho! To save fuel we didn't go as far as Gepps Cross, - stopping several hundred yards short of it. After this indoctrination how could anyone get lost with the directions? However read on!

To the trip Adelaide - Darwin.

Day 1 - Adelaide to Mambray Creek

Frank, - in your article you mention the trip to Copley as being " *It was a good and uneventful trip*" Surely you jest Frank! Just a couple of instances to refresh your memory. A few days later, on a cold Adelaide winter morning the inaugural Army Survey NT mapping convoy assembled on the Keswick 'Barracks road leading to 'Gate C', awaiting a 'photo opportunity' arranged by either Maj J K Nolan , or was it Army Public Relations'? As a raw 18-Year-old graduate-surveyor I was not privy to these arrangements, except to take my allocated seat alongside Sgt Bill Mitchell who was the driver at the head of the convoy in what was described as "*obviously the slowest vehicle in the convoy*", - a WW-II 3-ton 'Blitz' truck carrying the major portion of the stores for the planned six-month NT field trip. The other vehicles in the convoy were a couple of 1-ton trucks (mechanic and rations), the boss's Dodge 'people mover', and a dozen or so WW-II 'Jeeps', - Willys and Fords with their associated trailers carrying, - stores, water, firewood, (I'll get to that one too later on!), spare fuel, wood stoves, coppers, etc. Our ordered dress for the day, for publicity photos included our great-coats which were most welcome as most vehicles had no heating and only a few had canvass canopies/sides, the exception being the Dodge, and 1-ton trucks.

As Frank has described in his recollections his difficulties in locating Robin Wilson's place meant they were late, (already), and we hadn't even left Keswick' so Bill and myself were ordered by Maj JKN "*to forge ahead and, to save time, to prepare the morning cuppa for all at Port Wakefield*" Bill and I were soon on the Port Wakefield Road, having to estimate our speed as the speedo' in the truck was on the blink, but on Bill's advice to "*count the telephone poles as they are a chain or so apart, and at 80 to the mile we could calculate it*" With Bill's 'Watch GP - for the use of ... ' I calculated/estimated that we were doing about 60 mph, - well above JKN's strict convoy speed of 30 - 40 mph and would be in Port Wakefield well ahead of them, but with plenty of time to get the 'Dixie' boiling for the 'cuppa'. What we didn't know at the time was that the convoy had, because of various lane markings, and morning traffic close to Gepps Cross, fragmented with various vehicles heading left to Port Adelaide, right to Hope Valley, half-right towards Elizabeth, and only a few managing to get onto the correct road. The confusion and required round-up of stray vehicles that eventuated took a few hours but some time later they were all re-assembled and on their way. Meanwhile, - at Port Wakefield Bill and myself had boiled several Dixies of water, and made the same into tea expecting them soon. By the time they did arrive it was lunchtime so at least it avoided another potential stop, - and again the obvious risk of losing vehicles!

The 'lunch wagon', and crew was a symphony in motion, and something that will forever be in my memory. In the back of the I-tonner were 'Tables, folding, field 6' x 3', for the use of and immediately after stopping they were dragged out, two in line, revealing the ice-boxes stowed underneath. From these boxes the banquet would be assembled - fresh bread, cold meats, salads, fruit, juice, which could be washed down with lashings of hot tea from the 'tea urn' prepared that morning. Other travellers on the road must have marvelled at this veritable display of gluttony being displayed by the khaki-clad fellow-travellers.

Already well behind time and after re-fuelling some of the previously 'lost' vehicles at Port Wakefield, (already), the convoy did, (at last), make some headway towards Port Pirie. WO-II Robin Wilson had the bright idea that in order to avoid having to travel all the way into 'Pirie, and

then back out again there was a short cut he knew of from his courting days in the area, - most likely the route of the existing highway that now by-passes the town, near the Mobil service station. Seemed like a good idea so at the approximate turnoff he, in one of the I-ton trucks scooted down the side road, returning soon after reporting, "*it was not the one - being a dead-end!*" One of the more observant members remarked to Robin, - "*didn't you have a trailer when you went down the road, and now you have only an 'A' -frame?*" Disaster! Several vehicles were despatched down the dead-end road to recover the broken trailer, and stores and return to the convoy. Apparently, (as if it needs explanation), Robin in his haste at the end of the road had carried out the perfect three-point turn easily snapping off the trailer. The upshot is that in our haste to avoid 'Pirie we still had to go in, - find a welder, and get the trailer repaired. At least the Section's 'new chums' had an opportunity to have a gander about the place, - even if I nearly got run over by a train which was, (in those days), travelling down the main street!

Trailer repaired, loads, (again), re-arranged we set off in failing light to make Mambray Creek, (under 200 miles for the day), for the night. Geez, - was it cold! We only had our 'Beds - Camp Folding, etc ', a blanket each, (we were going to Darwin), and thankfully our great-coats! At least we had plenty of firewood from the creek and for some a port or two! Sleeping, however, was not too good, having only a six-foot stretcher set precariously in the creek bed on water-worn stones. After the first days fiasco I was wondering what I had gotten myself into!

Day 2 - Mambray Creek to Copley

It was a brilliant dawn when everyone was roused by WO-II Frank Johnson who didn't want to miss the scheduled freight train booked for our vehicles for the trip to The Alice on the 'Ghan at Copley that night. A quick breakfast from the duty cook, as dictated by our victualling officer, and after a quick check of the already-ailing vehicles by Tpt/Sgt Wally Brownlow, and his assistant Spr Bob Griffin, we were on our way north. I don't recollect a lot of that day except the stunning scenery of the Southern Flinders Ranges, and the skill that Bill Mitchell displayed to keep the Blitz going, especially on the loose gravel roads north of Quorn.

We arrived at Copley well after dark, - just as an outback touring circus was packing up and getting ready to leave town for their next appearance, however, not to be denied patronage by a mob of about 25 - 30 Army surveyors they soon unpacked what they thought would do and re-opened. It had just started to rain, and amidst the slush of the railway marshalling yard we ate, pitched our hutchies, and for some took in the sights of the circus. After a few ports some of the more adventurous members headed off to the boxing tent, - full of bravado, coming back a few minutes later, - noses bloodied, and with wallets considerably thinner. Bill and I slept under the truck, with Bill giving firm orders to me that when I woke him in the morning (with his tea) I was to remind him that he had his head under the rear diff' of the truck as without his glasses he was virtually blind. I did this as I gave him his morning cuppa, and then he sat bolt upright before collapsing back into his stretcher stunned. Luckily he didn't have to drive that day only having to put the truck onto the flat-top rail wagon, and having it tied down along with all of the remainder of the convoy.

Day 3 - Copley to Maree

We got away on the 'Ghan about mid-day, travelling only as far as Maree, only 74 miles north, where the whole convoy had to be trans-shipped from the standard gauge (4' 8 1/2"), to the narrow gauge track (2' 6"), at the terminal some miles out of town! Talk about a fiasco! The trans-shipping though was adequately handled by railway personnel whilst some of us walked back into town, - some miles to the pub, and hopefully some entertainment. Returning back to the trans-shipping facility in the dark was interesting. We had left in daylight, and no-one had thought to -bring a torch. The lights at the terminal looked tantalisingly close but it seemed to take hours stumbling along a pot-holed outback road/track.

Luckily we had berths on the train so we didn't have to set up our stretchers, - only having to fall into the bunks, or was it the seats in our 'dog box' accommodation.

Days 4 & 5 - Maree to Alice Springs

The trip on the 'Ghan, Maree to Alice' took a couple of days with stops at every place along the way, Duff Creek, Edwards Creek, Oodnadatta, etc. As Frank has said, - at each stop where there was a pub the train would stop and there would always be a mad stampede from the train to the front bar of the pub. The publican had obviously been pulling beers for some time, - having seen the approaching train, - flat beers on the left, - full-headed ones on the right. The well-travelled truckies and tourists knew exactly where to go. Coming into the barely lit bar from the outside sun it took a while to get one's eyes accustomed to the dark but in the knowledge that the freshest beers would be, (for this pub), "*to the right*" they were soon upon them, - money in one hand, beers in the other. The duration of these stops was short, and time was of the essence.

Always, it was a quick sprint, down a couple, and a quick sprint back to the train. In one instance I remember standing at the bar with Ron Weinert who was a drinker, and being tea-total wanting a cool lemon squash, - much to the publican's disgust. We were close to our time, and I said to the publican that we hadn't much time left when a fellow and his mate, clad in oily overalls next to me remarked that we had plenty of time. We could see the others sitting in the carriage 'dog boxes' looking out of the windows, - anxiously in our direction, and sweating profusely when our new-found friend advised that he, and his mate, were the driver and fireman and the train "*wasn't going anywhere without us!*" We had quite a few refreshments at the expense of the other's comfort before strolling back to the 'Ghan.

Eventually we arrived in The Alice, and commenced unloading the trucks, and 'jeeps'. Somehow in their trans-shipping at Maree they were now facing the wrong way to drive straight off, and would require reversing each vehicle over/across several wagons to the unloading ramp. I recollect that one wag railway employee asked Bill Love if he was authorised to drive the 1-tonner complete with water trailer. Confidently Bill said he could, and then offered to reverse them off over several flattop wagons. In a flash he was up in the track cabin, with no more than a couple of inches either side of the combination, when he was let off this dangerous, (if not impossible), task when a large forklift arrived to do the deed! At this stage in my career I couldn't drive, but Bill's action/intent gave me a real sense of confidence in him. So much so that later on in the Darwin area I elected to have Bill conduct my military driving lessons. That decision most likely explains Bill's (now) grey hair!

Days 5 & 6 - The Alice area

To prepare the vehicles for "*the long overland haul*" up the sealed one-lane Stuart Highway it was planned to spend a couple of days in The Alice, - accommodated at a local 'tented' tourist village just south of Billy Goat Hill. Our mechanical team would carry out the required tasks, whilst the rest of us took in the sights. I believe it was more for the benefit of JKN, but we all enjoyed ourselves immensely. I recollect at the Rev John Flynn's grave with the MacDonnell Ranges in the back-ground Ron Weinert mused that the plaque needed some 'improvement', commenting that it should read;

*"Beneath this stone, and deep within,
Lay the bones of The Rev John Flynn"*

Ron is 'one of a kind!', a mate, a friend, but he was not fully appreciated by the hierarchy. As (only) a survey assistant he was mostly given the jobs that were beneath most others! On the coastal survey from Darwin through to the Daly River, Fog Bay, Cape Ford, often out of sight of land, boat trip I questioned Ron on just how far could he swim, and his laconic reply was that he couldn't. When asked why he was on this hazardous job his philosophy was, (in effect);
"well - someone has to look after the out-boards, and the small boats, so it may as well be me!"

Day 7 - Alice to Prowse Gap

Still I digress! After a couple of days 'rubber-necking' around the local area, and as far away as Simpson's Gap, and other local landmarks, etc the vehicles were ready for the big over-land trek northwards. Maj JKN was very strict on correct Army vehicle convoy procedure/s, - the slowest vehicle out front, followed by the Jeeps/Dodge wagon, etc, with the mechanic's vehicle bringing up the rear. - all this at no more than 35 mph. Experience drivers were being driven out of their minds, especially after a sumptuous lunch taking to the bush, pulling over to refresh 'themselves from the water-bags, only to get back in squinting into the sun to go through the same procedure every ten or so miles. The first hour or so after lunch was always the worst, with many drivers driving on the throttle control often losing control on the occasional bend and spearing off into the scrub.

We eventually made Prowse Gap, about 65 miles from The Alice, for the night camp with a camp-site being selected amongst the spinifex in a shallow dry rocky creek bed. A few of us took the opportunity to climb the small range on the western side of the highway to take in the Central Australian views. At the end of a long, and laborious climb the effort was well worthwhile, - in the setting sun they were magnificent! After a wash, a meal, setting up our stretchers, we all settled down for the night, however, all through the night most of us were kept awake by approaching road trains from both directions, north and south, bearing down on the campsite as the selected a camp site was on the outside of a slight bend. The IP in fact! With a multitude of lights that looked as if they were on a collision course with the camp there were a lot of nervous surveyors!

Day 8 - Prowse Gap to Barrow Creek

An uneventful day just taking in the views. Bill and I were still out in front in the Blitz truck. On the roof we had a port where a Bren gun could be mounted, (if necessary). When the scenery from the cabin became monotonous, or it got too hot in the cabin, I could climb out through the hatch, and lay on the canvas tarp' over the load. Looking back I guess it was a bit juvenile, but then I was only 18 years old! We passed Central Mount Stuart, and again had the usual 'smorgasbord' luncheon laid out, the back of the 1-tonner ration vehicle on 'Tables, Camp folding'. Tourists, and truckies alike must have wondered just what these Army chaps were up to!

Suitably stuffed with a belly full of bread, preserved meats, pickles, etc hot tea, or cool water from the water bag/s we were soon back in the vehicles trying to keep awake. Again, driving on the vehicle throttle controls, it was impossible to keep fully awake, hence the occasional unplanned short trips bush by various drivers/vehicles. Towards evening we approached the mesas so evident in the Barrow Creek area where we made camp on a claypan just north of town. Just far enough to encourage everyone to stay in camp for the night, - the distance to town just out of the endurance of all. At least the camp was horizontal, and setting up our stretchers was a breeze. The day's travel, - a mere 111 miles!

Day 9 - Barrow Creek to Tennant Creek

Another day on the road. Everyone was in awe of the ever-changing scenery. Bill and myself saw more than most of the local wildlife, - camels, horses, 'roos, goats, etc. We passed through Wycliffs Well where it was rumoured that ET's were common, but we never saw one! Most of these phenomena appear well after dark. Through Wauchope to the Devils Marbles for lunch, and more sightseeing. At least it gave us the opportunity to work off the effects of another lunch before returning to the convoy!

Pushing on we reached Tennant Creek in the late afternoon, with May JKN opting for a camp-site in a dry gully north of town, - much to the chagrin of the drinkers in the convoy, however, following dinner there was a 'leave vehicle' to town. At least this camp was some hundreds of metres from the highway which gave us some confidence to get a good night's sleep! However, those who missed the leave vehicle at the end of their town trip had to make their own way into camp along a rough bush track by starlight.

Day 10 - Tennant Creek to Elliott

Apart from Three Ways road junction, where the Mount Isa road turns off suitably monumented, the country north of Tennant Creek is generally flat, and featureless, and by this time of the journey the novelty of adventure had started to wear a bit thin and Darwin, (when we got there), was looking more inviting. We hadn't seen any running or permanent water since leaving Port Augusta, and the dry, arid continent was having its affect on us. Even from the top of the truck I couldn't make out any sign of water in Lake Woods, to the west of the highway. There were a few water birds, - pelicans, etc but only they knew where the water was.

At Elliott we camped in the railway reserve on the eastern side of the road. If only they knew then that a hundred or so years later the long-promised north-south railway would bypass the town by some hundreds of kilo metres to the west, and the reserved area would be as useful as 'tits on a bull'.

Day 11 – Elliott to Mataranka

More travelling at a grinding pace of about 35 mph driving most to distraction, however, we had been promised a swim in the Mataranka thermal springs that night, "*if/when we get there!*". With this promise in our minds everyone did their utmost to get there, which we did by early evening. With directions from the manager at the Mataranka roadhouse and then homestead we found our way down into the creek where the 'springs were located.

As Frank has already said, - without any 'togs' most were skinny-dipping in the beautifully clear waters coming right up out of the sandy bed of the creek. The station staff had constructed some small retaining walls to allow easy access but apart from these small 'improvements' it was just a hole in the jungle with palms, and trees right down to the edge of the pool. It was a far cry from what is there now, - permanently fenced pocket-sized camp-sites all managed by Hitler-like park managers.

Soon a game of bush volleyball developed with a weighted tobacco tin of pebbles. As expected everyone gave the 'boss', (JKN), a respected wide berth, whereas everyone else when vying for the 'puck' spent more time on the bottom of the pool than above water. During a brief break in play JKN mentioned, to the effect, - "*I notice that you lads have been favouring me in the pool. Just a reminder, - that on the sports-field everyone is considered equal*", whereas upon recommencing play he went down to the bottom for the count amongst numerous sets of feet, legs, etc and upon resurfacing covered in scratches climbed out of the pool claiming he had had enough.

After all of this exertion and yet another great evening meal it was time to dance to the mozzies tune, dig out of the stores and apply the insect lotion, and for the first time in the trip set up the now ever required mosquito net. It was pretty evident that none of us had any idea on the siting of our beds, usually well away from any trees, or bushes where a 'net could be hung/hoisted! We soon learned!

Day 12 - Mataranka to Katherine

A short day, of under 70 miles, with a swim promised at the end of it, hence a leisurely departure from Mataranka but not before we all had another swim. It appeared that the short time we had spent at the thermal springs was just a small diversion in JFK's most-likely last field trip and he was not going to let any tourist spots go unvisited! The country now was well-wooded and by lunch-time we were in Katherine lunching just short of the railway bridge.

Enquiries confirmed the 'low level' was the best campsite to house the convoy, having adequate grassed areas on the bank/so Pretty soon we were all set up and apart from the rostered cooks spent the afternoon swimming in the Katherine River, - just upstream from the, (then), Katherine abattoirs. I wouldn't do it now though! With a sealed road into town there was also ample time to take in the sights of the town. I particularly remember Paddy's Bar, with a counter about 5'6" above floor level. Rumour had it that it is nigh impossible to swing a punch at the barman whereas he could quite easily punch anyone out from his lofty position! He kept a good bar, and trouble-makers were soon out on the street.

Day 13 - Katherine to Adelaide River

It was planned to make Berry Springs for the night. The 'Springs were, during WW-II a convalescent camp, and now a popular Darwin area swimming hole. Another 'tourist spot' that had to be visited. Anyway, the publican at Adelaide River sensing that we were 'green as grass', and wanting to sell beers warned Maj JFK of a "*vast herd of buffalo crossing the road just north of the pub and camping adjacent to the pub' would be the (our) best option*" Not to be deterred from his expected destination at Berry Springs Maj JFK advised the publican of the capability of the vehicles in the convoy - all (apart from the Dodge) being 4 x 4's. In a counter argument the publican suggested that "*the trucks could be OK, but the small 'Jeeps would be a pushover to a big buffalo*", and then he kept pulling beers.

In a compromise JFK ordered Bill Mitchell and myself in the Blitz 3-tonner to travel up the highway for a ½-hour or so and reconnoitre the situation. Both of us were, like the rest, as green as grass and were not too keen. After all of the bullsh.. We had heard about the attitudes of savage buffalos we were very wary. I'm sure we were both sitting on the engine cover in the centre of the cab' to protect ourselves should a wild buffalo rush out of the long grass. We travelled as far as Coomalie Creek without seeing a thing, and returned to Adelaide River to make our report to Maj JFK who was still in the hotel bar chatting with the publican who was, (I'm sure), still pulling beers. Upon hearing of a nil report, and fearing a lost sale (in fact a whole bar full of beers) the publican again countered with the argument "*that seeing a big truck the buffalo would hide in the tall grass, and rush out at the small Jeeps - most likely tipping some over*" Suitably alarmed JFK gave the order to camp, and almost instantaneously the bar was rushed, and emptied of beers. The publican had won the day!

We camped just north of the Pub' adjacent to an old railway platform, and the publican was well patronised for the rest of the night.

Day 14 - Adelaide River to Berry Springs

Suitably refreshed from our visit/s to the local pub', and a good nights sleep we set off to make Berry Springs for the night (only xx miles) - and to clean the vehicles, retrieve our previously laundered safari-style uniforms, etc for the 'big push' into Darwin - a whole xx miles. As I've already said Maj JFK was not going to be deterred from his planned stopovers!

Just north of Adelaide River another trailer, broke loose from its tow vehicle wrecking the trailer and spilling the load of firewood onto the highway. The load had been covered by a well-lashed covering tarp', and to most of us the contents were a complete surprise. Why would we be bringing firewood to the NT? It appeared that some officer-wag in Adelaide had conned Maj JFK to take a load of mallee up to the Officer's Mess at Larrakeyah "*for their winter fires*" It must have been a full ton in a ¼.ton trailer! At this late stage of the trip it was evident (even to Maj JFK) that he was the butt of a well- planned joke and the load of cut mallee was subsequently, unceremoniously dumped off the side of the road. The wrecked trailer was up-ended onto the back of another trailer and we pushed on. No one made any mention of the incident as it was (obviously) a sore point with the boss!!

We made Berry Springs, just west of the Stuart Highway, in a couple of hours and selected a campsite close to the lagoon. We were in paradise and everyone was soon in the pool (except the rostered cooks) enjoying themselves. There were swings, diving boards; the lot! The purpose of all this was to prepare the vehicles for our grand entrance into Darwin the following day, dressed in all our finery in' clean vehicles we were going to be an impressive sight. More so with Maj JFK at the head of the convoy in the Dodge 'people-mover'. So close to our destination - Darwin made for a restless sleep. We were all full of anticipation!

Day 15 - Berry Springs to Darwin

So close, and yet so far! Maj JFK took the lead with Bill and myself next in the 'Blitz, followed by the rest in strict convoy procedure. On suburban streets, obeying all the road rules Bill was making heavy work of it. The truck had a 'crash' gearbox, and the mechanical hand signals operated from the lefthand side didn't help either. We settled for me operating the sign whilst Bill struggled with the driving.

After navigating the various streets we were soon at Larrakeyah Barracks front gate where a laconic guard was on duty - fag in mouth, foot on the boom, who was not at all impressed with the show of glitz, and glamour we were putting on - shiny vehicles, starched uniforms, some members even shaved! Maj JFK introduced himself as "*being in charge of the Adelaide-based surveying Section sent to map the NT!* ", and upon seeking direction to his (the guard's) superior was told in a NT drawl, "*down the road, turn right ... mate!*" Not the ceremonious welcome he/we had anticipated! We were here, and ready to go. Billets were allocated in WW-II barracks and in no time we would all be '*Territorians*', - just like the lad on the gate!

(John D A Harrison)

VALE

William Lewis Love.

Bill passed away at Rose Court Aged Care facility on 28 April 2008 aged 75 years.

Bill was originally from Canberra and joined the Corps in 1956 after recruit training at Kapooka. After completing the 9/56 Basic Survey Course at Balcombe, he was posted to Central Command Field Survey Section in Adelaide. The Unit almost immediately commenced five years of survey operations in the Northern Territory and these were followed by a number of trips to the desert regions of South Australia. Not long after this, Bill left the Corps to join the SA Highways Department where he stayed until his retirement.

Delivering the eulogy at Bill's funeral, John Harrison recounted many of the humorous events that happened during those years. To those who were fortunate to know him, Bill was a mate, a mentor, a humanitarian, a colleague, a wet nurse to some and a devoted family man.

Bill will be missed by all who knew him and the Association extends its sympathy to his wife Elizabeth and his extended family.

Photo's of Anzac Day 2008



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