

**The Military Historical Society of Australia
ACT BRANCH**

LE GROGNARD!

October 2009

Committee 2009/2010

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NOTE!

Next Meeting – Tuesday 27 October 2009

Hellenic Club, Matilda Street, Woden at 7:30pm – Orpheus Room

**RMC: a Centenary Pageant for critical review
Robert Morrison**



Part of the Duntroon complex, photo courtesy of the Duntroon website.

In the beginning

In 1902 the first Commander of the Australian Military Forces, Major-General Sir Edward Hutton, recommended that a military college be established and Field Marshall Lord Kitchener was invited to visit Australia and advise the Government on the defence requirements of the Commonwealth. One of the recommendations of the 1910 Kitchener report was that a College should be established for the training of officers for the permanent military forces.

(part of the historical background detailed on the RMC Duntroon website)

Membership Renewal

Any person, irrespective of occupation and age, who has an interest in the study and research of military: history, customs, traditions, dress, arms, equipment, medals, and kindred matters, is most welcome to attend meetings. Anyone interested in joining the Society may contact the ACT Branch Secretary, PO Box 7139 Watson, ACT, 2602. Feel welcome to visit our website at: <www.mhsa.org.au>.

Military Quote of the Month:

A slipping gear could let your M203 grenade launcher fire when you least expect it. That would make you quite unpopular in what's left of your unit.

US Army's magazine of preventive maintenance (allegedly)

POETRY OF WAR

'When you see millions of the mouthless dead'

When you see millions of the mouthless
dead
Across your dreams in pale battalions go,
Say not soft things as other men have said,
That you'll remember. For you need not so.
Give them not praise. For, deaf, how should
they

know

It is not curses heaped on each gashed head?
Nor tears. Their blind eyes see not your
tears flow.

Nor honour. It is easy to be dead.

Say only this, 'They are dead.' Then add
thereto,

'Yet many a better one has died before.'

Then, scanning all the o'ercrowded mass,
should

you

Perceive one face that you loved heretofore,
It is a spook. None wears the face you
knew.

Great death has made all his for evermore.



Charles Hamilton Sorley

WORDS AND PHRASES OF WARFARE

This Month – All at Sea with Navy terminology

Bitter End

As any able-bodied seaman can tell you, a turn of a line around a bitt, those wooden or iron posts sticking through a ship's deck, is called a bitter. Thus, the last of the line secured to the bitts is known as the bitter end. Nautical usage has somewhat expanded the original definition in that today the end of any line, secured to bitts or not, is called a bitter end.

The landlubbing phrases "stick to the bitter end" and "faithful to the bitter end" are derivations of the nautical term and refer to anyone who insists on adhering to a course of action without regard to consequences.

Coxswain

As required by 17th century law, British ships-of-war carried three smaller boats — the boat, the cock boat, and the skiff. The boat — or gig — was usually used by the captain to go ashore and was the larger of the three. The cock boat was a very small rowboat used as a ship's tender. The skiff was a lightweight all-purpose vessel. The suffix “swain” means keeper, thus the keepers of the boat, cock and skiff were called boatswain, cockswain and skiffswain respectively. Until 1949, a boatswain's mate 3rd class in the Royal Navy was called a cockswain.

Bamboozle

In today's Navy when you intentionally deceive someone, usually as a joke, you are said to have bamboozled them. The word was used in the days of sail, also, but the intent was not hilarity. Bamboozle meant to deceive a passing vessel as to your ship's origin or nationality by flying an ensign other than your own — a common practice of pirates.

Carry On

In the days of sail, the officer of the deck kept a weather eye constantly on the slightest change in wind so sail could be reefed or added as necessary to ensure the fastest headway. Whenever a good breeze came along, the order to “carry on” would be given. It meant to hoist every bit of canvas the yards could carry. Pity the poor sailor whose weather eye failed him and the ship was caught partially reefed when a good breeze arrived.

Through the centuries the term's use has changed somewhat. Today, the Bluejacket Manual defines “carry on” as an order to resume work: work not so gruelling as two centuries ago.

Knows the ropes

When we say someone knows the ropes we infer that he knows his way around at sea and is quite capable of handling most nautical problems. Through the years the phrase's meaning has changed somewhat. Originally, the statement was printed on a seaman's discharge to indicate that he knew the names and primary uses of the main ropes on board ship. In other words, “This man is a novice seaman and knows only the basics of seamanship”.

INTREP

Outliving Custer. On 24 December 1922, John Martin, a retired railway ticket seller, died in New York City. Nothing particularly special about that, except for the fact the Mr Martin, born in Italy and originally named Giovanni Martini, had been a trumpeter in the 7th US Cavalry in 1876 and had been despatched from the Valley of the Little Big Horn with a message just prior to the opening of the battle of that name and the death of the acting commanding officer of the regiment, Lieutenant Colonel George Armstrong Custer, and several hundred of his men. Martini/Martin is thus credited with being the last man to have seen Custer alive and live to tell about it. Martini/Martin served in the US Army until 1904, when he retired and moved to New York to take a job with the NY City Subway Corporation, living to the ripe old age of 62.

Hurry Up! The French word *bistro*, meaning *café*, is derived from the Russian word ‘Bystro’, meaning ‘Quickly!’, which was shouted at terrified French waiters by Russian troops participating in the Allied occupation of Paris after Waterloo.

A Distinction of Sorts. The Wehrmacht's 26th Infantry Division was quite possibly the most ‘hard luck outfit’ of all time. Raised as one of the ‘First Wave’ divisions in 1935-1936, during the

initial expansion of the German Army, the unit was recruited in *Wehrkreis XXI*, around Cologne in the Rhineland, and bore that city's famed cathedral as its emblem. It campaigned in France in May and June of 1940, and then spent some time on occupation duty in Western Europe. In June of 1941 the division was assigned to the Eastern Front, at which point its troubles began. Between June of 1941 and September of 1944, the 26th Infantry Division distinguished itself repeatedly in combat, almost always being in the thickest action, notably at Kursk and Kowel.



Royal King Tiger courtesy of www.free-images.org.uk

But it also managed to be almost totally destroyed seven times in this period, each time being rebuilt. After its seventh brush with dissolution, in East Prussia in September of 1944, the division was rebuilt yet again, partially from surplus naval and air force personnel, as part of the '32nd Wave'. Redesignated a *Volksgrenadierdivision*, the 26th was sent west. In December, it participated to the Battle of the Bulge, to be virtually exterminated yet again! Rebuilt still another time, from old men and young boys, the division finally went down for the last time during the collapse of the Third Reich in the final weeks of April, 1945. In 46 months of combat, the 26th Infantry Division had been destroyed nine times, an average of once every 5.1 months. Surely a distinction – of some sort.

Giving Roman Soldiers the Goat. Roman soldiers on campaign were accommodated in eight man leather tents, measuring approximately 10' x 10', called *papiliones*. It is estimated that each *papilio* required the skins of 70 goats to construct.

D-Day 1918. The first use of D-Day and H-Hour by the US Army is found in *Field Order Number 9*, First Army, American Expeditionary Forces, 7 September 1918. The order reads in part 'The First Army will attack at H hour on D day with the object of forcing the evacuation of the St. Mihiel Salient.'

Calling a Spade a Spade? The US Army term 'Shavetail', slang for Second Lieutenant, is believed to have originated in the practice of shaving the tail of a new mule, so that the troops would know that it was untrained and apt to do something stupid.

Burn Them All. On the night of 30-31 March 1814, with Allied armies poised to capture Paris, the aged Marshal Jean Mathieu Philbert Serurier, Governor of *Les Invalides*, personally supervised the burning of more than 1500 battle flags captured by the French Army over the centuries, to prevent them from falling into enemy hands.

*Coming
this way
soon*

ACT Branch Speakers Program for 2009 - 2010

Tuesday 27th October "Orpheus Room"

"RMC – A Centenary Pageant for critical review – Robert Morrison

Monday 23rd November "Orpheus Room"

Title TBA – Kristen Alexander

Easter 2010 – MHSA Conference – Box Hill Melbourne

'That Ragged Mob'

Groundbreaking new book about Victoria's Boer War Bushmen

The launch of Boer War aficionado Robin Droogleever's latest book *'That Ragged Mob'* – the story of the 3rd and 4th Victorian Bushmen Contingents raised for South Africa in 1900 – was hosted by the Military Historical Society of Australia at the Oakleigh Carnegie RSL in Drummond Street, Oakleigh on Thursday 22 October 2009. Author Robin Droogleever made a presentation on the Contingents and was available for book signings.

The raising of the Bushmen Contingents in Australia was met with a mixture of cynicism and optimism. It was thought that men without militia training would be a disaster on the battlefield. They might even shoot each other! The optimism lay in the faith many had in the character of the Australian bushman – his riding skills, self-sufficiency, adaptability to extremes of climate and living conditions, his courage and his pride. As it turned out the optimists were right.

'That Ragged Mob' tracks the recruitment, organisation and exploits of the men of the Victorian 3rd and 4th Contingents who were recruited from across Melbourne and country Victoria. It looks at their courage, humour and weaknesses. These men fought at major battles such as Elands River and a host of minor skirmishes, enhancing their and Australia's reputation. The story relies upon the uncensored words of the men who were there.

The book also examines a controversy arising from their service - the 3rd Contingent later came to be called 'The Unrewarded' because it received not a single decoration, not even a Mention in Despatches, while the 4th Contingent became known as 'None but the Best' because it became the most highly decorated Victorian Contingent!

Over 200 descendants have assisted Mr Droogleever to complete *'That Ragged Mob'*. In this respect the book is as much a tribute to those families as it is about a period in Australia's military history which has long been overlooked. Robin Droogleever is one of Australia's leading experts on Australia's involvement in the Boer War with more than 40 years of study of the conflict.

RAF Hendon seeks Aussie author to publish

Andrew Cormack BA, FSA, the Honorary Editor of The Journal of the Society for Army Historical Research recently contacted the Federal Secretary, Kristen Alexander. He advised that the interests of the Society for Army Historical Research embrace Army and Regimental history, military antiquities and pictures, uniforms, badges and medals, arms and equipment, customs and traditions and the history of land warfare in general. The Society is also interested in the study of campaigns, commanders and the political aspects of war from the sixteenth century to the 1960s.

The Journal reflects member interests and the results of their own research. It is produced to a very high technical standard, is widely recognized as being at the forefront of British military studies, and is internationally renowned for its consistent interest, variety and scholarship.

Andrew advised the Federal Secretary that it has been some time since The Journal has received a submission from an Australian author and he would be delighted to consider papers from members of the Military Historical Society of Australia relating to either the British forces in Australia or Australian forces operating under the British Crown for publication. His contact details are:

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