

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

LE GROGNARD!

October 2010

Committee 2010/2011

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NOTE: This Month's Branch Meeting

25 October 2010, 7:30pm

Aegean Room, Hellenic Club, Woden

The guest speaker at this month's Branch meeting will be Dr Peter Stanley.

As most members will be aware Peter was for many years the Principal Historian at the Australian War Memorial before moving across to the National Museum of Australia in 2007 to take up the position of Head of the Centre for Historical Research. Peter will speak about his latest book [*Bad Characters: Sex, Crime, Mutiny, Murder and the Australian Imperial Force*], his next book – and more!

The speaker at **next month's meeting on Monday 22 November**, the last for 2010, will be Branch member Ric Pelvin – further details in due course. The first Branch meeting in 2011 will be on Monday 24 January. Please let me know if you would like to give a presentation during 2011, or have a suggested guest speaker in mind.

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University of the Third Age/U3A Aspects of Military History Course:

On 26 August MHSA Federal Secretary Kristen Alexander gave a presentation on Australian WW2 fighter pilot Dick Glyde. And, on 16 September MHSA Federal Treasurer Tim Lyon spoke about the Korean War landing at Inchon. Thanks Kristen, thanks Tim.

I remind Branch members that they are most welcome to attend sessions of this course which are held Thursdays 2.30-4.30 pm, Canberra Southern Cross Club Jamison, Cnr Catchpole & Bowman Streets, Macquarie. This year's course will conclude on 9 December; the course will resume on 3 February 2011. Please contact me if you want to know more - Ian Stagoll.

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New Zealand war hero Morrie Stanley, credited with saving more than 100 Australian soldiers during the Vietnam War, has died. He was 79.

[Abridged from *Radio New Zealand News*]

Morrie Stanley died peacefully on September 16 after a short battle with cancer at his home in Auckland. Earlier this year, he received an Australian award for gallantry during the Battle of Long Tan in August 1966.

Born in Christchurch in 1931, Morrie grew up in Napier and joined the army in 1949. He became an instructor at Waiouru and served in various command positions. A member of the Royal New Zealand Artillery he made his name when sent as a captain to Vietnam.

In 1966 the 34-year old, who later achieved the rank of Lieutenant-Colonel and was made a Member of Order of the British Empire for his actions, was one of three New Zealanders posted to an Australian army battalion regiment and at Long Tan kept the enemy at bay as he directed artillery fire down on to them in the battle's crucial hours.

Australian film producer Martin Walsh, who produced the documentary *Battle of Long Tan*, says Morrie Stanley guided the artillery in the near-impossible situation of being outnumbered 20-to-1 in a monsoonal lightning storm. Walsh says he wishes Morrie's actions were more widely known because he was crucial to the survival of the regiment.

[Footnote: In October 2008 I was fortunate to be able to arrange for Morrie to give a talk to the *Aspects of Military History* Course that I convene for the U3A - Ian Stagoll]



Society's Website:

As you may have noticed in the September issue of *Sabretache*, Federal Council needs to update the Society's Website's content! Peter Shaw, our Webmaster, is doing a great job managing the technical aspects but now we need someone to look after the content.

Federal Council is seeking expressions of interest from members willing to volunteer as our website content manager. He or she would work with the Webmaster to ensure the Website is fresh and modern and that content is up-to-date, as well as with the Federal Secretary and Branch Secretaries to source (and coerce!) content. He or she would also act as a portal for members wishing to contribute content.

If you are interested in the challenge of updating the Society's website and keeping it up-to-date, please contact Kristen Alexander, the Federal Secretary on fedsec@mhsa.org.au or phone 02 6258 7348 (business hours) to chat about the challenge or to submit an expression of interest.



Military Quote of the Month

'Tanks are easily identified, easily engaged, much-feared targets which attract all the fire on the battlefield. When all is said and done, a tank is a small steel box crammed with inflammable or explosive substances which is easily converted into a mobile crematorium for its highly skilled crew.'

Brigadier Shelford 'Ginger' Bidwell, OBE

Security Slip. On 12 July 1945, RAN frigate HMAS *Diamantina*, reported the finding of a small roll of paper, identified as a carrier-pigeon message, in the stomach of a shark caught off Saposu, New Guinea. The message was translated and found to be an appeal for assistance from the 42nd ALC Company, Japanese Army, 7 July, 1945.

A Generous Gesture. In August 1915, the US Navy's armoured cruiser USS *Washington* (CA-11), was lying at Port-au-Prince, Haiti during a local political crisis that would ultimately lead to nearly 20 years of American occupation. One morning the crewmen of *Washington* learned that 766 Haitian troops had been aboard a transport in the harbour without rations for four days; on hearing this news, the 1,100 men of the *Washington* donated their breakfast to the hungry men.

The British Army's 'Most Massacred' Regiment. Among the roll of regiments that have served in the British Army over the centuries, the one that holds the dubious distinction of having been wiped out more often than any other in the history of the service is the Essex Regiment, the former 44th Regiment of Foot.

The 44th Foot had its origins in 1741, when one James Long raised a regiment for the British Army, originally numbered the 55th Foot. In 1748 the regiment was renumbered as the 44th, and was later restyled the 44th East Essex. In 1851 the regiment merged with the 56th West Essex Regiment and became the 1st Battalion, the Essex Regiment.

On four occasions the regiment was virtually obliterated in action.

- 21 September 1745, Battle of Prestonpans, during the Second Jacobite Rising: of 291 men present in five companies, some were killed but most were captured, including 13 officers, among them the commanding officer, Lieutenant Colonel Sir Peter Halkett.
- 9 July 1755, Battle of the Monongahela ('Braddock's Defeat'), French and Indian War: the regiment lost heavily, with many killed, including Colonel Halkett and his son, and most of the rest wounded.
- 13 January 1842, Battle of Gandamak, First Anglo-Afghan War: the final battle of the British retreat from Kabul, only one man escaped death or capture, to make it back to India, Surgeon William Brydon; 41 men were subsequently released from captivity.
- 1 July 1916, Battle of the Somme, WW1: in 90 minutes (1050-1220) the 1st Battalion Essex Regiment took so many casualties that it was unable to continue in action.

In 1958 the 1st Essex Regiment was amalgamated with the 1st Battalion, The Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire Regiment to form the 3rd East Anglian Regiment, which in 1964 became the 3rd Battalion, Royal Anglian Regiment. In 1992 the regiment was wiped out for the last time, when the battalion was formally disbanded - *sic transit gloria mundi*.

Inter-Service Co-Operation (Not)!

Inter-service relations between the French Army and the French Navy, never particularly good, reached their lowest point at a cabinet meeting during the final days of peace in 1914, when War Minister Adolphe Messimy attempted to strangle Minister of Marine Armand Gauthier de l'Aude!

Chinese Casualties in the Korean War.

According to official Chinese sources, 1,010,700 Chinese volunteers' became casualties during the Korean War, including:

- c. 152,000 dead
- 383,000 wounded
- 450,000 medical hospitalizations
- 21,700 prisoners of war
- 4,000 missing in action.

William Littler Wins a Commission.

During the Allied assault on Lille in 1708, during the War of the Spanish Succession, the advance of the British 16th Foot was held up by the Marquette River, the expected crossing point being blocked by the fact that the drawbridge across the river had been drawn up and was covered by French troops in a strong position. Colonel Francis Godfrey of the 16th Foot (later the Bedfordshire Regiment) noted that the chains suspending the drawbridge were exposed, and thus might be cut. But to cut it would require a soldier to swim the river under enemy fire. Godfrey appealed to his troops, offering a fat purse to any man who would do the deed. Several men took up the offer but, one after another, each was shot down before he succeeded in getting across. Then Sergeant William Littler stepped forward. An educated man of sober habits, Littler had several times turned down a commission, preferring to remain a simple soldier. He told Colonel Godfrey: 'Sir, I don't want the money, only let me make the attempt, for the honour of the regiment', to which the colonel assented. Littler grabbed an axe, jumped into the river, and made his way across despite a hail of bullets. Reaching the far bank, and thus sheltered from enemy fire, Littler, though lightly wounded, climbed up the drawbridge to a point where he could chop away at the chains until the bridge fell. Seeing that the loss of the bridgehead was inevitable, the greatly outnumbered French abandoned the position. As a reward for his gallantry, and much against his own wishes, Littler was commissioned an ensign in the 3rd Foot. Over the following decades he rose through the ranks, serving in several regiments, including the 1st Foot Guards. In 1740 Littler was promoted to lieutenant colonel in the 47th Foot, and died in 1742, a highly respected officer who had never wanted to be an officer!

A Dangerous Occupation.

In October of 1917 the Austro-Hungarian 144th Infantry Regiment received its forty-first commanding officer since the outbreak of World War One in August 1914. The tenure of commanding officers to that date had averaged only 28 days before being killed, wounded, or otherwise separated from regiment.

A Painful Dining Experience.

Following his capture by the British in November 1942, *Generalleutnant* Ritter von Thoma of the *Afrika Korps* was invited to dine by Bernard Law Montgomery. On hearing of this, Winston Churchill remarked: 'Poor von Thoma! I too have dined with Montgomery.'



Commemorating recipients of the Victoria Cross

At September's Branch meeting *Sabretache* Editor Anthony Staunton presented an absorbing illustrated talk: *110 Victoria Cross postage stamps in 110 years*.

It set me wondering in what other ways VC recipients have been commemorated. Many have had buildings, particularly on military sites, including schools and [in Australia, at least] veteran's clubs, named after them, along with streets, suburbs and parks too. Remembrance Driveway from Sydney to Canberra, and streets in the ACT suburb of Campbell come readily to mind, as well as Gowrie in the Tuggeranong Valley, and the designated Gungahlin suburb of Jacka which has yet to be developed; not forgetting the NSW township of Holbrook.

In a similar vein, a number have been remembered with their names given to geographical features - such as Mt Kean, Mt Kerr, Mt Kinross, Mt Pattison, Mt de Wind, Mt Zengel and Mt Cornwell, all in the Canadian Rockies. All but the last are named after Canadian VC recipients, whereas Mt Cornwell remembers sixteen year old 'Boy Jack', hero of the Battle of Jutland.

Although not quite so imposing perhaps, in Australia we have Maygars Hill just north of Old Longwood, in Victoria. It was named in honour of Lieutenant Leslie Maygar, awarded the Victoria Cross during his service in the Boer War, who was to die near Beersheba in WW1. Nearby, Tubbs Hill at Old Longwood was named after Captain Fred Tubb; awarded the Victoria Cross for his actions at Lone Pine, Gallipoli, he went on to lose his life on the Western Front. Since the freeway was built traffic does not go over the original Tubbs Hill any longer, but there is a smaller hill on the freeway that has now been named Tubbs.

And then there are bridges. Burtons Bridge over the Seven Creeks in Euroa, Victoria, is named after Corporal Alex Burton, another of the seven Lone Pine VC recipients. And back in Canada, the Sgt. Aubrey Cosens VC Memorial Bridge crosses the Montreal River at Latchford, Ontario. In Calgary there is a bridge spanning the Elbow River which remembers John Pattison, the same soldier that the aforementioned Mt Pattison was named after.

Not quite on the same grand scale, a car park [!] was named after Acting Captain William Thomas Forshaw in his home town of Barrow-in-Furness, Cumbria, England - perhaps not inappropriately the area where it was located was redeveloped some years ago, but his name has not been attached to the new development.

During Anthony's presentation it became apparent that perhaps not many Branch members are stamp collectors. I don't know if we can count any train-spotters or railway enthusiasts among our membership, but I am aware that we have at least four model railroaders on our books - including myself, a newcomer to this pastime. The reason I mention this in passing is that perhaps the most impressive commemoration to Victoria Cross recipients, to my way of thinking, was the naming of two British locomotives after two such recipients.

The Patriot Class was a class of 52 express passenger steam locomotives built for the London Midland and Scottish Railway. The first locomotive of the class was built in 1930 and the last in 1934. Many, but not all, of the locomotives were named after British military

units, such as: *The Derbyshire Yeomanry, The Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire Regiment, The Royal Naval Division*, and even *The Home Guard*; interestingly, two of those with no connection to the military went by the names of *Lady Godiva*, and *Giggleswick* [a village in North Yorkshire].

The London Midland and Scottish Railway also saw fit to name two of their locomotives *Private W. Wood VC* and *Private E. Sykes VC*.

Twenty-one year old Wilfred Wood of the Northumberland Fusiliers was awarded the Victoria Cross following the Battle of Vittorio Veneto on the Italian Front in October 1918. Ernest Sykes, also of the Northumberland Fusiliers, was 32 years old when on the Western Front on 19 April 1917 he went out into no man's land four times to bring back wounded men, and then made a fifth journey remaining under conditions which appeared to be certain death until he had bandaged all those too badly wounded to be moved.

The railway connection? After the war Wood became a railway engine driver. Sykes who had worked as a platelayer for the London & North Western Railway Company before joining up later returned to work on the railways.

The locomotives concerned are no longer around - all of the Patriot class were withdrawn from service by 1965. However, their memory – and that of the two soldiers after whom those two particular locomotives were named - lives on; the name plates from both engines are now housed in the Regimental Museum of the Royal Northumberland Fusiliers at Alnwick Castle, the residence of the Duke of Northumberland.

Ian Stagoll

Society Mailing List:

If you haven't already done so, I remind members to consider adding your details to the mailing list [see Member Services on the website: www.mhsa.org.au]; it's a good resource for lodging enquiries and helping others with their research, as well as sharing information and hearing about matters of possible interest.

Anyone who has an interest in the study and research of general military history, customs, traditions, dress, arms, equipment, medals, and related matters, with particular reference to Australian military history, is most welcome to attend meetings of the ACT Branch of the Society.

For membership or other enquiries contact the ACT Branch Secretary, PO Box 7139, Watson ACT 2602, or visit the Society's website: www.mhsa.org.au.