



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



LE GROGNARD!

April 2011

Committee 2010/2011

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NOTE: This Month's Branch Meeting

**Monday 18th April, 7:30pm Aegean
Room, Hellenic Club, Woden**

Branch News:

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The guest speaker for the April Branch meeting will be Phil Roberts, who will speak on the topic of:

"Australian Army Aviation in Vietnam."

The guest speaker for the May Branch meeting will be Federal President, and ACT Branch member, Rohan Goyne. His topic:

'The Colo Wars' - Britain's small war in the South Pacific

I repeat, please advise if you would like to give a presentation during 2011, or have a suggested guest speaker in mind.

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MHSA Biennial Conference 2012:

I remind you that the ACT Branch will be hosting the Society's next conference, over the weekend Saturday/Sunday 3-4 November 2012. As I said last month, that might seem a long way off, but planning is underway now - suggestions are welcome; offers to assist, more so. A working group has been established, headed by Graham Wilson, together with Ian Ball, Tim Lyon and Nigel Webster.

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New *Sabretache* Editor - Expressions of Interest

The editor of *Sabretache* will retire at the end of 2011 and Federal Council is seeking expressions of interest for the position of editor to take effect from early 2012 (with a handover period during the production of the December 2011 issue). The present editor handles both editorial and manuscript production but these could be split and handled by an editorial team. The editor or editorial team is answerable to Federal Council but is responsible for all aspects of the publication of *Sabretache*. Selection of the printer and distribution is the responsibility of the editor with the assistance of Federal Council.

Skills/attributes required include: managing deadlines and budgets; good communication skills including liaison/negotiation with members, printers, book publishers and government organisations (including the Copyright Agency Limited); high level of writing/editorial skills and knowledge of Australian military history. Although *Sabretache* has been published and printed in the ACT for a number of years, there is no expectation that the new editor or printer would be based in the ACT.

Expressions of interest should state the experience and background of the applicant or in the case of a team, the applicants, including samples of work. Applicants should also consider how they would ensure that *Sabretache*:

- continues to be a relevant, quality journal
- best meets the needs and expectations of the membership in light of the recent members' survey (copies of the survey results available from the Federal Secretary)
- adapts to the challenges of changing technologies.

For further information contact fedsec@mhsa.org.au or editor@mhsa.org.au

Written expressions of interest should be sent to:

Federal Secretary
Military Historical Society of Australia
PO Box 5030
Garran ACT 2605
Or fedsec@mhsa.org.au by **15 May 2011**

The *Sabretache* Writers' Prize for Military History and MHSA New Writers' Prize

In December 2010, President Rohan Goyne announced the *Sabretache* Writers' Prize, a new biennial writers' prize for military history. Judging criteria and additional details have now been finalized and may be obtained from editor of *Le Grogard* at duty_first@hotmail.com

Ian Stagoll

Military Quote of the Month

‘A man does not have himself killed for a half-pence a day or for a petty distinction. You must speak to the soul in order to electrify him.’

Napoleon Bonaparte

Not a Bad Turn Out. When the French Army was mobilized in 1914, after the millions of reservists and territorials mobilized had re-joined the colours, it was found that only about 1,600 men had deliberately failed to report for duty - not a bad turn out at all.

‘Massa, You No Speak Here.’ During the American Revolution, Captain Sir James Wallace commanded the 50-gun ship HMS *Experiment*. In 1778 the ship was carrying the 23rd Foot (later the Royal Welch Fusiliers) to New York. As she approached the city, aware that a strong French squadron was lying off the harbor entrance, picking up stray British ships, Wallace decided to bring *Experiment* into the Long Island Sound. But to get to New York by way of the Sound and into the East River, he had to take her through Hell Gate, which had a very torturous channel between rocky outcrops and mudflats. A black pilot was engaged to guide the ship through the ‘reefs and shoals.’ At one particularly perilous spot, Wallace became concerned, and gave some orders from the quarterdeck. Without hesitation the black pilot touched Sir James on the shoulder, saying ‘Massa, you no speak here.’ Although taken aback, Sir James acknowledged the man’s authority, and the pilot subsequently brought the ship safely through, a feat of navigation that elicited expressions of admiration from no less a sea dog than Admiral Howe himself. As for Sir James, he arranged for the Admiralty to confer an annuity of £50 on the pilot, an enormous sum for the times, roughly a quarter of a Royal Navy captain’s annual pay.

The Mail Must Go Through. The official history of the US Army Quartermaster Corps records that at the height of American participation in the Second World War ports of embarkation in the US shipped a monthly average of 65,000 measurement tons of mail overseas, the peak being the November 1944 pre-Christmas load of 178,000 tons, which equated to almost 50 pounds for every man and woman overseas.

Last of the Redshanks - The Raid on Thurso, 1649. On 14 April 1659, a band of armed brigands attacked the small town of Thurso in the far north of Scotland. The raiders, a band that had been marauding in the Highlands for several years, had demanded tribute from the local inhabitants when they had arrived in the area. The refusal of the inhabitants to pay the demanded tribute enraged the leader of the band, Donald Macallister Mullich, a ‘powerful and ferocious’ Irishman who fought under Montrose in the Civil War, and he decided to sack the town and burn the church. When the locals learned of Macallister’s arrival outside the church, however, they armed themselves and led by Sir James Sinclair of Murckle, attacked and drove off the bandits. The aroused citizens of Thurso caught up with the bandit gang a short time later and a vicious battle ensued, which saw McAllister killed and his band defeated. After the battle, Sir James Sinclair ordered the surviving bandits to be killed, the bodies of Macallister and his men being buried at the entrance to the church they had intended to burn. The small fight at Thurso would have been just one more Highland scrap, except for one thing, Macallister’s band was the last remnant of the famous ‘Redshanks’, a once powerful Irish brigade that came to Scotland to aid the Marquis of Montrose and his Royalist forces during the English Civil War. Despite being outnumbered by the Highland Scots, the small force of Irish soldiers, men skilled in the use of their weapons and tempered in the continental battlefields of the Thirty Years War, easily routed far larger numbers of inexperienced men and became a force to be reckoned with. After the alliance of King Charles with the Scots Covenanters in 1646, however, the King’s forces in Scotland had been ordered to lay down their arms. While many of the Irish soldiers did so, and returned home, a number refused and carried on the fight. On 30 January 1649 Charles I was executed by the Parliamentarians in London. By this time there were few Irish fighters left in Scotland. Those who remained at first fought on as bands of guerrilla fighters, but they eventually developed a taste for looting,

robbery and extortion. One of these bands of brigands was the one led by Donald Macallister Mullich, which met its end at Thurso in April 1649 – the last known action of the once feared Redshanks.

Double Dipping? During the First World War, a brigade of the US Marine Corps served in the US Army's 2nd Division. Six men from the 4th Marine Brigade earned the Medal of Honor, and five of these men were presented with both the Army and the Navy versions of America's highest award for gallantry:

- Gunnery Sergeant Charles Hoffman, 5th Marines, Belleau Wood, 6 June 1918
- Sergeant Louis Cukela, 5th Marines, Villers-Cotterets, 18 July 1918
- Corporal John H. Pruitt, 6th Marines, Mont Blanc Ridge, 4 October 1918
- Sergeant Mate Kodak, 5th Marines, Poisson, 8 October 1918
- Private John J. Kelly, 6th Marines, Mont Blanc Ridge, 13 October 1918

Precisely why these men were presented with both the Army and the Navy versions of the Medal of Honor, for the same deed has never been satisfactorily explained. Nor has the reason why the sixth Marine in the 2nd Division to whom the Army awarded the Medal of Honor, Gunnery Sergeant Fred W. Stockham, awarded the Army Medal of Honor for heroism at Belleau Wood on 13 June 1918, was not also presented with the Navy Medal of Honor. It could be argued that since Stockham's award was posthumous, then this is the reason he of the six was the only one to receive a single version of the medal, however, this argument cannot be sustained, given that both Kodak and Pruitt's awards were also posthumous. (Footnote: Gunnery Sergeant Charles Hoffman received one medal under an assumed name, the one (Hoffman) under which he had enlisted in the Marine Corps, and one under his real name, Ernest August Jameson.)

D.H. Lawrence's Distant In-Law. In 1914, British author D.H. Lawrence (*Lady Chatterley's Lover*) married the German born divorcee Frieda Weekely. Through his new wife, whose maiden name was Emma Maria Frieda Johanna *Freiin* (Baroness) von Richthofen, Lawrence was distantly related by marriage to the famous 'Red Baron', Manfred Albrecht *Freiherr* von Richthofen. Although some people claim that Frieda was the 'Red Baron's' sister, this is incorrect; Frieda was born in Metz, the daughter of Friedrich Ernst Emil Ludwig *Freiherr* von Richthofen, a German Army engineer, while Manfred was born in Kleinburg, near Breslau, the son of Major Albrecht Phillip Karl Julius *Freiherr* von Richthofen.

Carrier HMS *Ark Royal* put up for auction on MoD website. The aircraft carrier HMS *Ark Royal* is up for sale on the UK Ministry of Defence's auction website. The Royal Navy's former flagship was decommissioned in March after 25 years in service, as part of the government's defence budget review. Proposals for it include turning it into a commercial heliport, a base for security personnel during the London Olympics, or a school and nightclub. But it could also be sold for scrap like its sister ship HMS *Invincible*. *Ark Royal's* operations have included leading the UK's naval forces during the invasion of Iraq. The current ship is the fifth vessel to carry the name - the first saw battle in 1588 against the Spanish Armada.

The Other Battle of Villers-Brettonneux. Most Australians have at least heard of the Battle of Villers-Brettonneux, fought by the AIF on Anzac Day 1918. How many, however, are aware of the 'other' Battle of Villers-Brettonneux, fought on 27 November 1870? The battle occurred during the Franco-Prussian War as the commander of the French Northern Army, General Farre, desperately tried to hold onto Amiens. To this end he deployed the bulk of his small army, three brigades, totalling 17,000 men, around Villers-Brettonneux. Facing them were the 40,000 men of the Prussian I and VIII Corps, with the 3rd Cavalry Division attached, all under the command of Edwin von Manteuffel. Farre's troops fought hard, held the Prussians on the right flank and launched a number of spirited counter-attacks to retake lost ground in the centre and on the left. By the afternoon of the battle, however, Villers-Brettonneux was lost and with his men exhausted and almost out of ammunition, Farre ordered a withdrawal to the fortified town of Arras. Although this withdrawal robbed the Prussians of a decisive victory, it did mean the abandonment of Amiens, which now gave the Prussians a strong garrison in the north and virtual domination of the Somme Valley. The battle cost the French Army of the North over 2,300 killed, wounded and missing, while the Prussian Army lost approximately 1,300 officers and men.

A Likely Sounding Excuse. During US Army exercises in Tennessee in May 1941, one of the tanks of Major General George Patton's 2nd Armoured Division, in trying to avoid a collision, accidentally rammed into

the tiny town hall of the just as tiny town of Bell Buckle, Tennessee. When publicly criticized for the incident, Patton retorted: 'Belt Buckle isn't even on the map!'

HMS Atlantic Isle. During World War Two, the tiny British territory of Tristan da Cunha, a tiny volcanic island in the South Atlantic, was commissioned as a shore establishment of the Royal Navy under the name of HMS *Atlantic Isle*. The new 'ship' was established as a communications and weather station. The arrival of the Royal Navy had a profound impact on the previously isolated islanders, with the population being able to see a motion picture for the first time ever and islanders being able to earn a cash wage, again for the first time ever, which they could then spend in the Canteen established for the military personnel. Sixteen of the islanders even served in the Tristan da Cunha Volunteers, set up under the auspices of the RN (although there were only enough rifles for thirteen of them).

Spanish Riders. During the First World War Austro-Hungarian troops referred to the wooden frames used to hold barbed wire in place as "*Spanishe Reiter* – Spanish Riders", in reference to the frames used by the famous Spanish Riding School in Vienna during performances of the school's famed Lipizzaner horses.

On The Button. During the Second World War, RAF Bomber Command aircrew were issued with a variety of concealable items designed to assist in evading or escaping captivity if shot down. One of these items was a tiny compass, concealed inside a uniform button. The buttons looked exactly like the normal item; however, they were constructed in two pieces, with the compass concealed in the smaller piece at the rear, and the two pieces were threaded to enable the face of the button to be unscrewed from the rear, to reveal the tiny compass. Inevitably, the dastardly Hun eventually became aware of these items and began to take the precaution of checking all uniform buttons of captured Bomber Command aircrew. When the ingenious escape kit suppliers in the UK became aware of this, however, they simply reversed the thread on the false buttons, which apparently fooled the searchers. (Note: thanks to fellow ACT Branch member Col Simpson, well known button collector, who recently showed me one of these 'RAF escape buttons', and explained to me the reverse thread dodge.)

Manlian Discipline. In 340 BC, when Titus Manlius Torquatus was consul of Rome for the third time, Rome became involved in a war with the Latins, largely over Latin demands for a greater political say in the government of the Latin League, but also for perceived Latin insults against the gods of Rome. During the conduct of the war, Manlius and his co-consul, Publius Decius Mus, decreed that the old military disciplines would be reinstated, and no man was allowed to leave his post, under penalty of death. Manlius's son, seeing an opportunity for glory, forgot this stricture, left his post with his friends, and defeated several Latin skirmishers in battle. Having the spoils brought to him, the father cried out in a loud voice and called the legion to assemble. Berating his son for leaving his post without orders, he then handed him over for execution, to the horror of all his men. From this incident the term 'Manlian discipline', a form of discipline much admired by such Roman authors as Livy, Sallust and Cicero and held up by them as an ideal, was coined.

The Iron Duke Gives a Lesson in Generalship. Arthur Wellesley's *The Dispatches of Field Marshall the Duke of Wellington: During his Various Campaigns in India, Denmark, Portugal, Spain, the Low Countries, and France, from 1799 to 1818* was published in 1838. Despite the fact that the memoir, which consists of a dozen volumes of documents plus a separate index, makes for some seriously dry reading, *The Dispatches* was something of a best seller. It is reported that one day soon after publication of the series, one of the Duke's friends remarked that he had been reading the volumes of *The Dispatches* that dealt with Wellington's campaigns in India from 1796 to 1805. The man stated that he was surprised to find that there was little about fighting in the volume, and said, 'It seems to me Wellesley, that your chief business in India was to procure rice and bullocks.'

'And so it was,' replied Wellington. 'For if I had rice and bullocks, I had men, and if I had men, I knew I could beat the enemy.'

Mussolini Ditches His Mistress for Hitler. Margherita Grassini, born in Venice in 1880 the daughter of a wealthy Jewish lawyer, grew up in a *palazzo* situated at the *Canale Grande* in Venice and was educated by private tutors. However, she was soon attracted by socialist ideas and escaped her parents' home at age 18 by marrying Cesare Sarfatti, a lawyer from Padua many years her senior. In 1902 the couple moved to Milan. Here, in 1911 Margherita Sarfatti met, and started an affair with, Benito Mussolini. As a highly educated

and intellectual woman, she played a significant role in the rise of fascism, only to be discarded when her lover turned to anti-Semitism, unable to credit a Jewish woman as his collaborator in the forging of a new ideology. Italian Fascism was not inherently anti-Semitic, but when Mussolini's conquest of Abyssinia drew opprobrium from the League of Nations, he found solace only from Hitler. To curry favour with the Fuhrer, the Italian race laws were passed in 1938 and Sarfatti necessarily had to leave Mussolini's bed. Sarfatti left Italy for Argentina and Uruguay, and she worked as a journalist in Montevideo. After the war, in 1947, Sarfatti returned to her home country and once again became an influential force in Italian art.

Footnote on Margherita Grassini. On 28 January 1918 Corporal Roberto Sarfatti, the 17-year old son of Margherita Sarfatti, was killed in action serving with the *Alpini* on the Asiago Front; for his gallantry that day he became the youngest Italian soldier ever to win the *Medaglia d'oro* for bravery.

The Other Battle of Le Cateau. Most will be familiar with the Battle of Le Cateau in Flanders on 26 August 1914, famous for the multiple VC action of members of the Royal Field Artillery who saved the guns of the 37th Battery under heavy German fire. There, was, however, a previous Battle of Le Cateau, fought on 28 March 1794 during the Flanders Campaign of the French Revolutionary War, a conflict mounted to attempt to defeat the nascent French Republic. At the 1794 battle, allied forces under the Prince of Coburg defeated French forces at Le Cateau. While the allies won the battle, however, they lost the campaign, being eventually driven north by a huge French counter-attack. The British portion of the allied force originally withdrew into Holland, however, they were then forced to evacuate to Hanover, from whence they were repatriated to Britain.

Das Boot As It Might Have Been. In 1977, the German film company that owned the rights to Lothar-Günther Buchheim's epic submarine novel *Das Boot* approached Hollywood with an idea of co-sponsorship, to help share the costs and gain access to the technical effects of American studios. The conditions of such cooperation, however, which included more action sequences and the machine-gunning of survivors in the water, convinced the Germans they were better off making their own film. The success of *Das Boot* with world-wide audiences validated their decision. (INTREP Note: Hollywood of course then turned around and showed us all what a fine World War Two submarine movie they could make with the production and release of the stellar *U-571*!)

MYTH BUSTING 101

Not All Aristocrats. The standard view of the officer corps of the Imperial Russian Army at the outbreak of World War One is that of a group of rich, titled buffoons with no military skill. This is very wide of the truth, the fact being that military service was not highly thought of by the aristocracy. The Imperial Army's officer corps was a professional, dedicated group that drew heavily on the tiny Russian middle class for its membership, while nearly 40-percent of the army's officers were of peasant origins, having been promoted from the ranks.

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Anyone who has an interest in the study and research of military history, customs, traditions, dress, arms, equipment, medals, and related matters, particularly where such are relevant to Australia, 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.