



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



***LE GROGNARD!***

June 2011

**Committee 2010/2011**

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**NOTE: This Month's Branch Meeting**

**Monday 27<sup>th</sup> June, 7:30pm Aegean  
Room, Hellenic Club, Woden**

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

**There is no guest speaker for the July Branch meeting; instead Branch President Ian Stagoll and Federal Secretary, and ACT Branch member, Tim Lyon will argue the case that *'Throughout the course of the nation's history Australian military forces should not have engaged in any theatre of war beyond Australian territory'*. Any support for this argument would be welcome. Those who might hold an opposing view are encouraged to come along and take part in what is hoped will be a lively discussion.**

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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.

## Research Assistance Requested:

Branch member Graham Wilson is conducting research into the history of Australian Army detention system and facilities 1914-1947, with a view to publishing a book on the subject. He asks any members who have information on the subject or who can suggest sources of research, apart from the AWM and NAA to contact him at [duty\\_first@hotmail.com](mailto:duty_first@hotmail.com).

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Ian Stagoll

## INTREP

### Military Quote of the Month

‘My attack on Singapore was a bluff – a bluff that worked. I was outnumbered more than three to one.’

**General Tomoyuki Yamashita**  
**Imperial Japanese Army**

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**The Anglesea Cannon.** The Anglesea Barracks Sergeant’s Mess in Hobart is the on-again, off-again custodian of a small wooden cannon that has a remarkable history. The HMAS *Wagga* Petty Officer’s Mess first presented the wooden cannon to the Mess in 1956 and the presentation commenced a tradition where the cannon would be liberated from the Mess for a fee which would go to Legacy. At times the cannon has been absent for many years, being taken around the world and even transferred to other ships for the return trip to Anglesea. The Anglesa Cannon has circumnavigated the globe aboard USS *Missouri* and been taken underwater on HMAS *Ovens*; however, it was a trip under the North Pole in 1985 that saw the cannon into enter into military history. The cannon was aboard USS *Aspro*, a nuclear submarine, on its voyage under the North Pole. During the voyage, *Aspro* carried out an historical rendezvous with another nuclear submarine, the USS *Queenfish*, under the ice and the cannon was transferred to *Queenfish* during that time. As each liberation and transfer has taken place, small plaques have been added to the base, with additional wooded bases being added as more space was needed – the current bottom base is made from part of the decking of USS *Missouri*. Not all the liberations were by the Navy, with the Australian Army’s ‘Red Berets’ Parachute Display team, an NZ MP unit and a RAAF unit possessing the cannon at some stage. HMAS *Westralia* took the cannon to war on a tour of duty in the Persian Gulf in 1991. The cannon was later taken into Kuwait before being returned to Australia. The cannon was taken to the Antarctic in 1995 and also did a tour of duty into East Timor aboard HMAS *Anzac* in 1999. The Anglesea Cannon currently resides in the Sergeant’s Mess at RAAF Base Williamtown.

**The Sinking of HMS *Prince Alfred*.** During the Second World War, the British-born German propagandist William Joyce, better known as ‘Lord Haw Haw’, reported the sinking of the Royal Navy ship HMS *Prince Alfred*, not just once, but twice. This was quite a feat for the German armed forces, considering that *Prince Alfred* consisted of a pair of shore based schools, one at Hove and one at Lancing, both in Sussex, for the training of Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve Officers! (‘Lord Haw Haw’ also announced the sinking of HMS *Kestrel*, a shore-based station of the Royal Navy’s Fleet Air Arm and home to a flying training school for ratings!)

**Harrumph!** At the outbreak of the Second World War, a young accountancy student named Peter Prior enlisted in the 5<sup>th</sup> Battalion, the Royal Berkshire Regiment. Showing an aptitude for soldiering and leadership, Prior was rapidly promoted to sergeant and then recommended by his Commanding Officer for a commission. Prior, however, failed the very first question thrown at him by the commissions board: “Prior, do you hunt?” The answer was ‘No’, and he was returned to his unit. His outraged CO, however, declared that he was “not in the habit of having my recommendations turned down”, and forcefully intervened to

have Prior re-boarded and he duly received his commission, originally in the infantry but from 1944 to 1946 in the Intelligence Corps, in which he reached the rank of captain, serving in the D-Day landing and then later in the fighting in Europe, for which he was mentioned in despatches and awarded the French *Croix de guerre*. (Footnote: Peter Prior, who died in April 2011, went on to become the first non-family member to run Bulmers, the world's largest cider manufacturer; he also took up free-fall parachuting at the age of 51 and in 1981 set a British record for the longest-delayed civilian parachute drop; he was also the first civilian to parachute into central London, landing in Hyde Park as part of the celebrations for Australia Day.)

**A Bad Night for New Zealand.** During the Second World War, New Zealand, under an arrangement with the Royal Navy, manned or part-manned a number of British warships, including the cruisers HMS *Achilles*, *Leander* and *Neptune*. Sadly, on the night of 19 December 1941, HMS *Neptune* steamed into a newly laid Italian minefield off Tripoli and after striking four mines went down, taking with her 737 of her 767 man crew; of the 30 men who survived the sinking, only one was still alive when the survivor's lifeboat was picked up five days later by an Italian gunboat. Among the dead of *Neptune* were 150 young New Zealanders (not a single New Zealander in the crew survived) – a very bad night for New Zealand.

**Adding Up the Numbers.** In 1960, the former RAF Station at Worthy Down in Sussex was handed over to the Royal Army Pay Corps and the site became the home of the RAPC's Electronic Accounting Development Unit. As such, it housed the corps' IMB 705 mainframe computer system. Significant enough in terms of bringing the British Army's pay and accounting systems well and truly into the 20<sup>th</sup> century, in 1961, Worthy Down's mainframe was used to process the 1961 UK Census, the very first time that the census had been tallied electronically.

**Australian Corps Reinforcement Camp.** On 1 December 1917 the AIF raised the Australian Corps Reinforcement Camp at Caestre, France. The role of the Corps Reinforcement Camp was to manage the flow of personnel into and out of the Corps, including managing the training and re-training of men prior to drafting to their formations and units. The Camp consisted of a Headquarters, commanded by a Lieutenant Colonel; a Corps Depot, which would later expand into the Corps Depot and Corps Artillery Depot, which was responsible for the reception and allocation of all reinforcements; and four Divisional Wings, one each for the four active divisions of the Australian Corps. In 1918 a Physical Training and Battle Fitness School, a Lewis Gun School and a Gas School were added to the establishment. The HQ included a Supply Depot and a Bath Detachment. One of the roles of the Corps Reinforcement Camp was to hold all members of the AIF who were under the age of 19, including men already serving in combat units who were found to be under the age of 19 and had previously been sent back for attachment to General Hospitals and Casualty Clearing Stations until they reached the age of 19; on reaching the age of 19 the men could then be sent to front-line units.

**Nicolas Appert.** In 1795, keen to come up with, amongst other things, an effective way to fight scurvy in the French Navy, the French Directory offered a prize of 12,000 francs to anyone who could invent an effective method of keeping food fresh. Eight years later, after much trial and error, a French chef named Nicolas Appert provided a naval commission at Brest with samples of food sealed in glass jars and then cooked in heated water. The commission placed the samples in storage for three months and then opened and served them. In his report to the Minister of the Navy, the head of the commission stated that:

The broth in the bottles was good, the broth with boiled beef in another bottle was very good as well but a little weak; the beef itself was very edible. The beans and green peas, both with and without meat, have all the freshness and flavour of freshly pickled vegetables.

The French Navy embraced Appert's preserved foods with fervor and the new items virtually eradicated scurvy from the French Navy. While Appert's bottling technique would eventually be superseded by canning and other preservation techniques, he has the distinction of being the first person to come up with a useful method of providing healthy, nutritional and tasty food for military use.

**Martyrs of the Race Course.** On 18 February 1865, the city of Charleston, South Carolina, where the American Civil War had begun almost four years before, surrendered to the Union Army and most of the white residents fled the city. During the final year of the war, the Confederates had converted the city's Washington Race Course and Jockey Club into an outdoor prison. Union captives were kept in horrible conditions in the interior of the track; at least 257 died of disease and were hastily buried in a mass grave behind the grandstand. After the Confederate evacuation of Charleston black workmen went to the site, reburied the Union dead properly, and built a high fence around the cemetery. They whitewashed the fence and built an archway over an entrance on which they inscribed the words, 'Martyrs of the Race Course'. On 1 May 1865, in a demonstration of thanks for their newly achieved freedom, a parade of 10,000 black citizens of Charleston was held on the race track. The procession was led by 3,000 black schoolchildren carrying armloads of roses and singing the Union marching song 'John Brown's Body'. Several hundred black women followed with baskets of flowers, wreaths and crosses. They were followed by a column of black men marching in cadence, then by a brigade of black Union infantrymen. Within the cemetery enclosure a black children's choir sang 'We'll Rally Around the Flag', the 'Star-Spangled Banner' and spirituals before a series of black ministers read from the Bible. After the dedication, the soldiers of the famous 54<sup>th</sup> Massachusetts Volunteers, along with those of the 34<sup>th</sup> and 104<sup>th</sup> United States Colored Troops, performed a special double-columned march around the gravesite. The old racetrack is gone, but an oval roadway survives on the site in Hampton Park, named for Wade Hampton, former Confederate general and the governor of South Carolina after the end of Reconstruction. The black demonstration apparently caused outrage in white circles throughout the South, however, the black citizens of Charleston don't seem to have cared. (The old gravesite of the Martyrs of the Race Course is gone now; the Union dead were disinterred in the 1880s and reburied at a national cemetery in Beaufort, South Carolina.)

**The ATA – Women with Wings.** At the outbreak of the Second World War a shortage of skilled pilots was addressed by the establishment of the Air Transport Auxiliary (ATA), which consisted of qualified pilots who, for various reasons, were not eligible for enlistment. The only eligibility criteria for appointment as an ATA pilot was possession of an A class flying licence and logbook with at least 250 flying hours. ATA pilots carried out a range of non-combat tasks, the most common being flying aerial 'taxies' to ferry aircrew and other Air Force personnel between bases, and ferrying new aircraft from the factory to operational units. Of the 1,245 pilots who served with the ATA, 168 were female. At first, despite being every bit as good as the job as their male counterparts (sometimes better) and doing exactly the same work, female pilots received lower pay than male pilots, were not entitled to a marriage allowance (as the men were) and were not entitled to RAF accommodation (again, which the men were); in addition to not being entitled to RAF accommodation, females were not entitled to a billeting allowance, which was payable to male pilots who could be provided with RAF accommodation. The female pilots (along with their male counterparts of course) flew an amazing range of aircraft, from trainers to fighters (including Hurricanes, Spitfires, Corsairs, Mustangs and Avengers); twin-engine aircraft, including medium bombers such as the Mosquito, the Beaufighter and the Invader; and four-engine aircraft including the Stirling, the Lancaster, the B-17 Flying Fortress and the B-24 Liberator. In a single day's flying, ATA pilot Lettice Curtis flew two trainer aircraft, a

Spitfire, a Mitchell, a Mosquito and a Stirling! Finally, in 1944, by which stage the female ATA pilots were flying every class of aircraft except for flying boats, their skill and expertise were recognised and they were accorded equal pay and conditions to that of their male counterparts (it is believed that this decision made the ATA the first 'equal opportunities employer' in history and certainly the first in the aviation industry). During the four years of the ATA's existence 14 female pilots, including the famous Amy Johnson, lost their lives.

**British Professional Footballers' Association Buys VC.** In the November 2010 Spink's medal sale, the First World War Victoria Cross group of Lieutenant Donald Simpson Bell, VC, 9<sup>th</sup> Battalion, Alexandra, Princess of Wales's Own (Yorkshire Regiment) (the 'Green Howards') was sold. A pre-war teacher, Bell was also a passionate footballer and had played at the amateur level for Crystal Palace and Newcastle United; in 1913, he signed as a professional player with Bradford Park Avenue FC as a means of supplementing his teacher's income. At the outbreak of the war Bell terminated his contract with Bradford and enlisted in the 9<sup>th</sup> Green Howards as a private, gaining a commission before the battalion left for France in November 1915. Temporary Lieutenant Bell was awarded the VC for an action on 5 July 1916, when he attacked and destroyed a German machine gun post which was holding up the advance of his company during an attack on Horseshoe Trench on the Somme. Although he survived this action, Bell was killed five days later performing a similar action. The pre-auction estimate for Bell's group, consisting of his VC and First World War trio of 1914-15 Star, British War Medal 1914-1920 and Victory Medal, plus his Death Plaque, was £140,000-160,00, however, the final price was £252,000. Fittingly, given Bell's pre-war footballing connection and the fact that he was the first English professional footballer to enlist, despite some fierce bidding in the room, his medals were purchased by the Professional Footballers' Association and they will now be displayed in the National Football Museum in Manchester.

**Sikorsky to the Rescue.** On 3 January 1944, two catastrophic explosions aboard the US Navy destroyer USS *Turner*, anchored off Sandy Hook, New Jersey, sank the ship and killed all but one of the ship's officers and 137 of its 230 enlisted men. Most of the survivors were badly injured and were taken to a hospital on nearby Sandy Hook (probably the military hospital in Fort Hancock, a coast artillery fort on Sandy Hook). The small hospital was critically short of everything needed to handle the emergency, but most of all was desperately short of blood plasma. While there was plenty of blood plasma not too far away in New York, the north-eastern American seaboard was at that time shut down by a monstrous winter blizzard, which had not only closed all airports but had also made road travel impossible. Learning of this, and remembering a recent demonstration of the versatility of Igor Sikorsky's wonderful new machine the helicopter, which he had viewed several weeks before, Rear Admiral Stanley Parker, US Coast Guard, Commandant of the Third Coast Guard District, rang Lieutenant Commander Frank Erikson, USCG, the Coast Guard's first helicopter pilot, Sikorsky's official military test pilot and the commander of Coast Guard Helicopter Detachment 1 at the Sikorsky Field in Bridgeport, Connecticut and asked Erikson if it would be practicable for a helicopter to pick up blood plasma at New York City's waterfront Battery and fly it to Sandy Hook in the current weather. Although Erikson had never flown his HNS-1 Hoverfly either at night or in bad weather, he immediately said yes. Erikson took off from Bridgeport and battled the weather to get his helicopter to Battery Park, where two cases of plasma were strapped to the helicopter's floats. Because of the angle that Erikson had been forced to make in his landing approach due to the gusting winds over Manhattan Island, he was unable to take off forward and had to take off backwards, a manoeuvre he had not previously practiced. Erikson managed to get his ungainly aircraft back into the air and then fought his way through the storm to Sandy Hook and delivered the desperately needed blood plasma. In a later newspaper interview, Erikson described the flight as 'just routine for the helicopter'. Erikson's flight was the very first life-saving mission flown by a helicopter.

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## How the Sayings Came About:

Have you ever wondered where the terms ‘sideburns’ and ‘hooker’ (American slang for a prostitute) came from? Well, both of them date from the American Civil War. Sideburns, widely favoured as a male facial hair fashion in INTREPS’ younger days, owe their name to Union general Ambrose Burnside. Burnside was noted for his unusual facial hair, joining strips of hair in front of his ears to his moustache but with chin clean-shaven; the word ‘burnsides’ was coined to describe this style and word parts were later reversed to give ‘sideburns’. As for ‘hooker’, although it is known to have been used obscurely as early as 1845, it owes its modern origin to another Union general, Joseph ‘Fighting Joe’ Hooker. Hooker had an unsavoury reputation (possibly undeserved) as a hard-drinking, womanizer, and there was a contemporary claim that a band of prostitutes accompanied his headquarters wherever it went; this band was derisively referred to as ‘General Hooker's Army’ or ‘Hooker's Brigade’, and it from this that the modern American term ‘hooker’ derives.<sup>1</sup> Now you know.

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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](http://www.mhsa.org.au).*