



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



LE GROGNARD!

August 2011

Committee 2010/2011

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NOTE: This Month's Branch Meeting

**Monday 22nd August, 7:30pm
Aegean Room, Hellenic Club, Woden**

Branch News:

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There will no speaker at the August meeting, as this will be the Annual General Meeting of both the Society and the ACT Branch (see notice below).

The guest speaker for the September Branch meeting will be ACT Branch Member Ian Ball. His topic:

'Raising a militia unit – the Canberra experience'. Ian will cover the raising of a militia company in 1936/37 as part of the expansion of the militia.

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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August Branch meeting – Annual General Meeting:

Monday 22 August 2011 – 7.30pm Orpheus Room , Hellenic Club, Woden

Following the AGM, for both the Federal Council and the ACT Branch, which will include the election of office-holders for the forthcoming year, it is proposed to have a general discussion about the way forward for the ACT Branch, as well as an update on the Society's 2012 Biennial Conference which the Branch will be hosting. It will also be an opportunity for members to tell others about any research projects underway, and perhaps to seek help with answers to any questions one may have. Also, an opportunity to bring along any items of ephemera or artifacts that might be of interest.

Again, please let me know if you would like to give a presentation at a Branch meeting down the track, or perhaps can suggest a guest speaker who might be of interest.

Lastly, Society membership renewal forms were posted out with the June issue of *Sabretache*, and please bear in mind that only financial members of the Society are eligible to vote at the AGM.

Notice to Members from Federal Secretary:

Notice to ACT Branch members

Federal Council and the ACT Branch will conduct their Annual General Meetings on Monday 22 August 2011 at the Hellenic Club (usual meeting details to be advised in the August *Le Grogner*).

Both Federal Council and the ACT Branch will conduct elections for committee members.

Federal Council has four vacancies, including Federal Secretary/Membership Officer and Vice President.

Please contact Kristen Alexander 6258 7348 alexfax@alexanderfaxbooks.com.au to put forward your nomination or for information about the exciting and fulfilling duties of Federal Secretary.

The ACT Branch has vacancies for President, Vice President, Secretary, Treasurer, and at least one committee member.

Please contact Ian Stagoll 6254 0199 ian.stagoll@gmail.com to put forward your nomination for or information about the ACT Branch vacancies.

If you are not able to attend the meetings, please contact Kristen and Ian for applicable Federal Council and Branch proxy voting forms.

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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Branch Member Wins Gold Medal at US Convention:

ACT Branch member Graham Wilson, who is also a member of the Orders and Medals Society of America (OMSA), recently attended the OMSA Convention in Jacksonville, Florida. Graham entered a display of Australian Federal Police medals into competition and won a Gold Medal for his efforts.

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Ian Stagoll

Military Quote of the Month

“Apparently not enough nuns are joining.”

**The Most Reverend Dr. Daniel Mannix
Catholic Archbishop of Melbourne**

Responding to accusations that not enough Catholics were enlisting to fight the war - 1915

Sergeant ‘Dick’ Turner MM – a Sad End. In June 1941 Sergeant Richard ‘Dick’ Turner, 6th Australian Division Army Service Corps, was captured in Greece and placed in a POW camp. From there he was put on board a train with fellow POW, bound for Germany, but when the train was blocked by destroyed tracks, the POW dismounted and continued the journey on foot. Turner and an unnamed companion lagged behind during the march and then escaped when the column took a short cut across a hairpin bend. The two escapees were fed and sheltered in a small Greek village, before spending autumn and winter of 1941/42 in the mountains of Thessaly, living in caves and at one point a hollow tree. Turner's companion was eventually recaptured and Turner himself was suffering from malnutrition and malaria, but fortunately he met Ioannis Kallinikos who sheltered him for a year and a half. In 1943 Turner joined the Greek resistance (ELAS), becoming the leader of fifty Greek *andartes*, and eventually made contact with Major Dickinson, a British Liaison Officer, who signalled to Allied Headquarters in Cairo that Turner was alive and well. Turner joined Maj Dickinson's group which was later taken over by Maj Dillon, and ‘Dick’ was awarded the Military Medal (MM) for the resistance work he carried out in Greece. On Sunday 17 December 1944, ‘Dick’ Turner was scheduled to fly home to Australia and sat in the back of a truck, dangling his legs over the end, for the journey to the airport. He was killed by Greek communist insurgents who opened fire from a brewery as the truck passed through a shallow valley. He was buried in the Commonwealth War Cemetery at Kalamaki.

Socialist Capitalists? Mercenary pilots serving the Republic during the Spanish Civil War of 1936-1939 were paid \$1,500 a month, plus a bonus of \$500 for every confirmed kill. At that time the dollar was worth some 15-30 times what it is today.

Canadian Provosts Clean Up. In 1944, during the breakout from the Normandy beachhead, a detachment of MPs from No.8 Company Canadian Provost Corps under the command of a sergeant accompanied the tanks of the 4th Canadian Armoured Brigade as they drove into the French town of Gruchy. No sooner had the armoured column entered and secured the town than they then roared out again in pursuit of the retreating enemy, leaving the somewhat bemused red caps to complete the mopping up process. Having cleared out as many pockets of Germans as they could find, the small group MPs then found themselves at something of a loose end so they decided to get on with their own job, laying out traffic control and other military police arrangements. When the follow up infantry of the division entered the town, fully expecting a fight on their hands from the Germans who would have been left behind by the tanks, they were amazed to find red capped and white gauntleted MPs on duty and the position fully consolidated.

Which Bank? In 1877, not long after the Battle of the Little Big Horn, the US Congress adjourned without making provision to pay the Army for the next fiscal year! While enlisted men went without pay for the next 12 months, the New York firm of Drexel Morgan offered officers loans on their pay at 5 percent interest, whereupon New Orleans' Louisiana National Bank offered interest free loans.

Fred Kollmorgen's Story. Fred Kollmorgen (VX29061 Private Frederick William Kollmorgen) enlisted in the AIF on 24 June 1940 and was a member of the band of the 2/22nd Infantry Battalion. The 2/22nd Band was largely composed of bandsmen from the Brunswick Salvation Army but also included members from Springvale, Moreland and Hawthorn. They were led by Bandmaster Arthur Gullidge who was the Bandmaster at Brunswick Salvation Army Corps and to this day is recognised internationally for his brilliance as composer and musician. Fred Kollmorgen has the melancholy distinction of being the only member of the 2/22nd Battalion Band to survive the war. The rest of the members of the band died either in the fighting at Rabaul, in New

Britain, where the battalion had been sent to form part of the ill-fated Lark Force, or later perished in the sinking by an American submarine of the Montevideo Maru, which was taking Australian POW to Japan. Fred had evaded capture when Rabaul fell and escaped the Japanese by:

walking: 700 miles
canoeing: 60 miles
wading: 25 miles
boating: 80 miles

along the south coast of New Britain.

It was an epic journey punctuated by aggressive aerial surveillance by the Japanese, severe malaria, malnutrition, crocodiles, little clothing, the crossing of fierce streams and a treacherous jungle. Eventually repatriated to Australia, Fred was medically downgraded and served in a Guard Company until March 1944, when he was medically discharged as a result of the deterioration of his health following his harrowing ordeal on New Britain.

Fred Kollmorgen passed away on Sunday, 24 July 2011, aged 94.

Body Bags and 'Speedballs'. While the enemy in Afghanistan is easily resupplied, being able to buy or steal much of what he needs to fight, Allied forces must plan for constant resupply. Day and night, around Afghanistan, supplies go out via ground convoys, fixed-wing aircraft, and parachute. Another method used by American forces, however, is 'speedballs' delivered by helicopter. In Afghanistan water and ammunition are; the consequences of running out of water or ammunition are roughly equal. Ideally, in combat it is better to do fewer resupply runs with more supplies per run. Fewer missions reduces stress on helicopter resources, and means fewer landings in hostile areas, mitigating risks. Frequent resupply also can allow troops to travel light. 'Speedballs' were developed by the Americans recently following a number of incidents where small units (platoon sized or less) ran critically short of ammunition and needed rapid resupply with minimal risk to the delivery assets. Speedballs are small, ad hoc resupply packages that are dropped off by helicopter. They are not sling-loads that might weigh ten-tons or more, but man-portable packages. Units pre-package speedballs, whenever possible in body bags, which are the wrapper of choice because they are tough and easy to hand-carry. Packages are number coded so that when a commander calls from the field, he can simply say something like: 'I need a #1, and three #2s.' The crew grabs the numbered speedballs and loads them into a helicopter and flies them to the requesting unit, generally not even needing to land, delivery consisting of a quick hover while packages are tossed out to the troops on the ground.

To quote an American soldier in Afghanistan: 'When it absolutely positively has to get there or you might get overrun and killed: Call Speedball-express.'

First World War 'Holy Grail'. Archaeologists recently began the most detailed ever study of a Western Front battlefield, an untouched site where 28 British tunnellers lie entombed after dying during brutal underground warfare. First World War historians have referred to the site as the 'holy grail'. The privately owned plot of land in the sleepy rural village of La Boisselle has been practically untouched since fighting ceased in 1918, remaining one of the most poignant sites of the Battle of the Somme. When most people think of the Great War, they think of trench warfare interrupted by occasional offensives, with men charging between the lines. But with the static nature of the war, military mining played a big part in the tactics on both sides. The idea of digging underneath fortifications in order to undermine them goes back to classical times at least. But the use of high explosive in the First World War gave it a new dimension. One of the most notable episodes was at the Battle of Messines in 1917 where 455 tons of explosive placed in 21 tunnels that had taken more than a year to prepare created a huge explosion that killed an estimated 10,000 Germans. Tunnelling was mainly done by professional miners, excavators and navies recruited in Britain, Australia, Canada and New Zealand. A brief timeline of events that led to the 'holy grail' includes:

- 28 Sep 1914 - German advance on Amiens halted by French forces. Fierce fighting over the cemetery and farm buildings
- Dec 1914 - French begin mining to retake the farm. Intense struggle above and below ground
- Aug 1915 - British take over the sector from the French with tunnels now at a depth of 40ft (12m)

- 1 July 1916 - British launch disastrous Battle of Somme with village on main axis of attack. Two huge mines - Y Sap and Lochnagar - create massive craters, one 270ft (82m) wide by 70ft (21m) deep
- 4 July 1916 - British capture village after further heavy fighting
- March 1918 - German troops overrun trenches in the village during Operation Michael, part of the huge *Kaiserschlacht* offensive
- Aug 1918 - Welsh troops liberate La Boisselle

What happened at La Boisselle in 1915-16 is a classic example of mining and counter-mining, with both sides struggling desperately to locate and destroy each other's tunnels. After six years of painstaking paper research, the researchers had built up detailed knowledge of the event and the individual tragedies involved. They knew the exact locations and depths at which each man was lost, the circumstances of their deaths, and almost all of their names. And yet it was only when the owner of the site chose to open it up to research that they were able to finally connect the stories to the place. The Lejeune family, who have owned the land since the 1920s, have a deep affinity with the site and have known many British veterans who served at La Boisselle. But it was only after visiting the team's excavations at nearby Mametz last May that they decided to offer their land up for historical study. Archaeologists, historians and their French and German partners now aim to preserve the area - named the Glory Hole by British troops - as a permanent memorial to the fallen. Digging does not start until next year, but the first practical steps of mapping the tunnels and trenches using ground-penetrating radar, and exploring the geophysics are under way. Some open tunnel sections have already been entered and are considered remarkably well preserved. The team intends to leave the bodies undisturbed in the collapsed tunnels, but any others found in trenches will be reburied in accordance with the Commonwealth War Graves Commission. Bomb disposal experts will be on standby to negotiate the unexploded ordnance they will inevitably uncover. They also expect to find graffiti on the walls, poetry, bottles of drink, and all manner of artefacts untouched since the day fighting ceased. In short, they say, it's a time capsule. The long-term intention is to open the site to the public, and the whole project is expected to take five to 10 years. For one of the team members, Simon Jones, a former curator at the Royal Engineers Museum, the dig is about completing the stories of the two Tunnelling Companies (179th and 185th) who worked at the Glory Hole. Mining was perilous work in a hidden war, which remained a state secret for many years, meaning the men did not get the recognition they deserved. By studying war diaries, tunnel plans, letters, maps and records, Jones has identified 25 of the 28 British and all 10 French tunnellers at the Glory Hole. The number of Germans remains unclear. The British soldiers were lost between August 1915 and April 1916, sometimes individually but more often two or more at a time.

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How the Sayings Came About: Are 'Wellington Boots' - also known as: rubber-boots, wellies, wellingtons, topboots, billy-boots, gumboots, gummies, barnboots, wellieboots, muckboots, sheepboots, shitkickers, or rainboots - really named after the Duke of Wellington? Apparently so. Wellies are a type of boot based upon modified leather Hessian boots, which were worn and popularised by Arthur Wellesley, 1st Duke of Wellington. This novel 'Wellington' boot then became a fashionable style emulated by the British aristocracy in the early 19th century. The 'Iron Duke' instructed his shoemaker, Hoby of St. James's Street, London, to modify the 18th-century Hessian boot to provide a more practical and comfortable item of footwear to wear on campaign. The resulting new boot was fabricated in soft calfskin leather, had the trim removed and was cut to fit more closely around the leg; the heels were low cut, stacked around an inch (2.5 centimetres), and the boot stopped at mid-calf; it was suitably hard-wearing for battle, yet comfortable for the evening. The boot was dubbed the Wellington and the name has stuck in the English language ever since. The Duke can be seen wearing his namesake boots, which are tasseled, in an 1815 portrait by James Lonsdale. 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.