



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



LE GROGNARD!

September 2011

Committee 2010/2011

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NOTE: This Month's Branch Meeting

**Monday 26th September, 7:30pm
Aegean Room, Hellenic Club, Woden**

Branch News:

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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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Ian Stagoll

Military Quote of the Month

“Once more unto the breach, dear friends, once more,
Or close the wall up with our English dead!
In peace there's nothing so becomes a man
As modest stillness and humility;
But when the blast of war blows in our ears,
Then imitate the action of the tiger:
Stiffen the sinews, summon up the blood.”

William Shakespeare
Henry V, Scene 1

Royal Australian Navy Coaling Battalion. During the First World War, a constant supply of coal was required by the RAN in order to keep the fleet effectively in operation. In early 1916, the provision of this critical resource was threatened as a result of strike action and other difficulties with the Sydney Coal Lumpers Union (SCLU). To address the problem, discussions with the SCLU resulted in an agreement between the union and the Commonwealth, under which the coal lumpers agreed to be enrolled under government control as members of a newly created naval auxiliary entitled the "Naval Transport Coaling Battalion", more usually referred to as the "RAN Coaling Battalion". Members of the SCLU who enrolled in the unit were deemed to have enlisted for active service and were issued with distinctive badges and armbands to indicate their status - the insignia consisted of a black cloth oval badge, picked out in red and with the title "R.A.N. COALING CORPS" embroidered in red in the centre. The battalion was officered by the managers of the leading coal companies and by the president and secretary of the SCLU. During the coal strike of 1916, the Commonwealth government requisitioned all coal stocks in the country and the members of the coaling battalion handled these stocks without objection. However, when railway workers struck as part of the General Strike in August 1916, many of the coal lumpers went out in solidarity with them and this spelt the end of the short-lived RAN Coaling Battalion, which was disbanded on 25 September 1917.

Nobles in the Interwar German Army. The German Imperial Army had relied heavily on the old nobility for its officers. Although the huge size of the Imperial Army necessitated granting men of middle class origins commissions, their promotional opportunities were limited, and it was rare for someone not a member of the nobility to secure a senior command assignment, and of those who made it, most usually ended up being ennobled by the Kaiser. When the First World War broke out in 1914 only one commoner could be counted among the nearly 150 officers who commanded divisions, corps, armies, and similar higher organizations, and even he was shortly ennobled. The situation was only a little better for the commoners on the regimental level; in nearly 62 percent of Prussian regiments, half or more of the officers were nobles, and in 16 regiments, mostly of the guard or the cavalry, all the officers were. So important was the belief that nobles made the best officers that when a proposal was put forward in 1912, at a time when about a third of all officers were nobles, to increase the active strength of the army by a couple of corps, it was turned down on the grounds that there weren't enough nobles around to provide proper leadership for the new units.

The collapse of the German Empire in 1918 and the creation of the Weimar Republic led to some liberalizing of the officer corps. The army – the *Reichsheer* – was reduced by the Treaty of Versailles to 100,000 men, and only about a fifth of the 4,000 officers remaining were members of the nobility. Nevertheless, in 1926 a parliamentary inquiry found that despite the fact that there were only about 800 nobles in the officer corps, they still dominated the army:

- Of 42 generals, 25 were nobles (60 percent).
- Of 105 colonels (not counted in branch figures), 45 were nobles (42 percent).
- Of 595 cavalry officers, 265 were nobles (44.5 percent).
- Of 1,512 infantry officers, 265 were nobles (17.5 percent).
- Of 589 artillery officers, 61 were nobles (10.4 percent).
- Of 724 officers (who could be of any branch) assigned to the Defense Ministry or held other types of assignments, 162 were nobles (22.4 percent).

Of the balance of the 4,000 officers in the army, most were technical specialists, such as engineers and signalmen, and about 400 were medical and veterinary personnel, few of whom were nobles. Oddly, although the Nazi regime is not usually thought of as a democratic force, with the advent of Hitler, the proportion of nobles in the army fell, and not merely because there weren't enough nobles to go around (there hadn't been in 1914 either), but even in the higher ranks. By October of 1935, the proportion of nobles in the highest ranks of the army (above divisions), had fallen to about 52 percent, by the onset of World War II, in September of 1939, to about 42 percent, and so forth, until by end of the war, in May of 1945, nobles held only about 20 percent of senior posts, still over-represented, but much less so.

Britain Lowers its Military Sights. The British Army is to undergo radical force structure changes to develop forces available for one enduring medium scale and up to two small scale interventions. It is reported that the Army will restructure to have 5 multi-role brigades, each consisting of an armoured regiment, an armoured reconnaissance regiment, an armoured infantry battalion, a mechanised infantry battalion, two light infantry battalions and supporting elements. The UK Defence and Security Review, from which the changes stem, claims that this innovation is best practice based on the last two decades of intervention and building deployable forces around infantry battalions. Further, it states that "*these brigades represent the best basis on which to generate its forces for Afghanistan, provide an optimised golf bag of capabilities for future conflicts*", and that Divisional level of command has proven value "as part of tactical gearing" in Iraq and Afghanistan. There will be a migration of combat support and logistic assets currently held at divisional level into these brigades. The aim is to keep one brigade at high readiness, available for an intervention operation, and four in support to ensure the ability to sustain an enduring stabilisation operation. In the short term all five will be committed to the operation in Afghanistan. The combat capability of the brigades after Afghanistan will depend on future equipment projects including a scout vehicle and the delayed programmes to field a utility vehicle and conduct a mid-life update of Warrior.

After its current tour in Afghanistan, 16 Air Assault Brigade – with its mixture of attack helicopters, parachute and air assault battalions – will return to its original role as a high-readiness intervention brigade with supporting units, trained and equipped to be one of the first ground forces to intervene in a new conflict. So, too, will the navy's commando brigade, including its army elements. The army will retain its capability at the higher tactical level to field one fully deployable, divisional headquarters, and the ability to regenerate a second deployable divisional headquarters, although this will have the routine function of commanding training. And the UK-led Allied Rapid Reaction Corps (ARRC) headquarters remains part of NATO, although its communication and logistic support will be reduced. It will also seek to retain and develop many of the 'enabling' units that have been part of its response to Iraq and Afghanistan including stabilisation and cultural specialists, human intelligence, EOD and UAV units. The army will also:

- be cut by around 7,000 to about 95,000 personnel by 2015, but with no changes to combat units involved in Afghanistan and an assumption of a requirement of about 94,000 by 2020;
- reduce by one the number of deployable brigades;
- reduce holdings of Challenger 2 tanks by around 40% and AS90 artillery guns by around 35%; and
- significantly reduce the non-deployable regional command structure.

Rail Requirements of a German Army Corps in 1914. With some variation, in 1914 the average combat-ready German army corps typically comprised two infantry divisions, a light infantry battalion, two heavy artillery regiments, a pioneer battalion, a machine gun detachment, and a training battalion, plus a small air unit, and some headquarters and support personnel, for a total of about 40,000 men. To move such a corps from its depot to its deployment area required 280 trains. These comprised over 12,000 wagons, of which:

- 170 were passenger carriages for the officers,
- 965 were freight wagons for the troops,
- 2960 were specially fitted wagons for horses,
- 1915 were flat cars or freight wagons for artillery and impedimenta, and
- c. 6000 were freight wagons for ammunition, food, fodder, and supplies.

Considering that the German Army mobilized 26 regular and 13 (slightly smaller) reserve army corps, plus 12½ cavalry divisions, 10 independent reserve, *Ersatz* (replacement), and *Landwehr* (3rd line) divisions, as well as 16 separate *Landwehr* brigades, not to mention many smaller formations, such as heavy howitzer and mortar battalions and batteries, pioneer units, and railroad battalions, as well as naval reservists called up to strengthen the fleet, all of whom were in place within 15 days of being called up. On paper, mobilization required some 11,000 trains, comprising over 460,000 railroad wagons, though actually far fewer were involved, since as soon as troops were delivered to the front, the trains would head back to pick up more. This was probably the largest single movement of troops by rail in history.

NZ Fake Medals the “Real Thing”. A recent controversy in New Zealand concerning the authenticity of a set of medals and other memorabilia connected with a First World War NZEF member who had been executed in 1918 seems to have been resolved. A medal dealer in Nelson had offered the medals and other items of Private Victor Manson Spencer for sale on the NZ e-trading site “Trade Me”. Spencer had been executed in France in 1918 but was “pardoned” by the NZ government in 2005 and his descendants issued with his medals and roll of honour parchment. When Nelson militaria dealer Rici Brennan recently offered the items for sale on “Trade Me”, he was challenged on the authenticity of the items by a second cousin of Spencer’s, Fred Ryan, who angrily claimed that he had the original medals in his possession, in fact hanging on his wall, and made a number of defamatory remarks about the dealer, as well as threatening legal action. When threatened with counter action by Brennan, however, Ryan backed down and has now publicly admitted that the medals on his wall are not the originals and agrees that those originally offered by Brennan for sale are the authentic medals. Needless to say, the NZ media, without of course first checking any details, had a field day at Brennan’s expense, right up until Ryan admitted that his claims were false and that his charges were unsubstantiated.

Oops! In March, 1942, a seven-inch shell struck the 37th floor of the Equitable Life Insurance Building in New York, but caused little damage and no injuries. The shell was one of eight fired by an anti-aircraft battery (probably from the 1st Battalion, 602nd Coast Artillery (Anti-Aircraft), later the 602nd Anti-Aircraft Artillery Gun Battalion (Semi-Mobile)) near the East River by mistake - the other rounds all fell harmlessly into the river. Although no one was hurt and little damage was done, the New

York City Police switchboard was jammed for hours following the incident as panicked New Yorkers, convinced that the city was under attack, tried to seek guidance or assistance.

The Lion Dies but Never Surrenders! In May 1940, a mob of Fascist youths in Rome gathered outside the Sant' Anna gate of the Vatican and mounted a staged and orchestrated demonstration demanding that the editor of the Vatican newspaper, *Osservatore Romano*, be handed over to them. The Fascists were incensed that the Vatican paper continued to publish uncensored anti-Fascist news and were determined to put a stop to it by beating or perhaps even killing the paper's editor. When the crowd reached the gate and tried to enter, however, they were stopped by a single Swiss Guard on sentry duty who stood firm in his allocated position without moving a muscle and dared the crowd to try to get past him. As the group of youths egged each other on and tried to build their group bravery up to point where they would be able to muster enough courage to take on the single young Swiss soldier, the duty officer of the Swiss Guards arrived on the scene with a detachment of guardsmen as reinforcements. Sweeping his eyes over the crowd, the officer placed his hand on his pistol holster and issued the order: "Collect your rifles from the guard room, load five rounds and fix bayonets!" The Swiss Guardsmen collected their Mauser KAR98 rifles from the adjacent guard room, as well as ammunition from the locked ammunition boxes in the strong room, then turned out next to the duty officer and, in full view of the crowd, loaded a charger of five rounds each into their rifles, fixed bayonets and took up a position standing at ease in a line behind their comrade who had so far stared down the crowd armed only with a 19th century vintage sword. Faced by the resolute Swiss Guards, who were shortly joined by a detachment of armed Papal Gendarmes, the crowd backed down and dissolved. As soon as the crowd had cleared, the duty officer had his detachment unfix bayonets and unload their rifles and return rifles and ammunition to the guard room. The detachment was then dismissed, leaving their lone companion still at his post, where he remained until relieved several hours later. (*Helvetiorum Fidei ac Virtuti* ["To the loyalty and bravery of the Swiss"] – inscription on "The Wounded Lion", the monument to the Swiss Guards in the Swiss city of Lucerne.)

Uncle Sam Feeds his Cadets: The West Point Ration Scale, 1820. Although still in its formative years, by 1820 the US Military Academy at West Point had begun to acquire some institutional permanency, which was reflected in increasingly detailed regulations for the discipline and training of cadets. The officially prescribed ration, for example, was surprisingly good, as can be seen in this excerpt from the Academy regulations (with spelling, style and capitalization unaltered):

- Breakfast. Good coffee with a sufficient quantity of Milk and Sugar; Fresh Bread & Butter, Smoked beef or ham or cold meat. Radishes & Cucumbers may be substituted occasionally for the relish of meat for breakfast in the season of them.
- Dinner. Fresh Meat either Beef, Pork, Veal, or Mutton well roasted, with good bread & Potatoes & two of the following kinds of vegetables: Beets, Onions, Turnips, Cabbage or Carrots. In their season dried Beans may be given, but not to exceed once in every six days; there shall always be proper sauce or gravy for the meat.
- Supper. Tea of good quality with Milk and Sugar; fresh bread and butter.

Additional provisions mandated that the Academy Steward was to serve pie for supper and pudding for dinner, and, somewhat surprisingly, that on certain occasions, such as Independence Day, cadets of appropriate age could be treated to a ration of wine, grog, or other alcoholic beverage. It is interesting to note that the main meal of the day was at noon, with "Supper" no more than a light snack. While the menu may not be appealing to modern tastes, it is worth pointing out that it was much more nutritious and varied than the standard ration for US Army enlisted men. The enlisted ration relied heavily on pork and beef, usually salted, rarely including veal or mutton, with frequent issues of hard tack rather than fresh bread, and infrequent issue of vegetables (although, even so, the soldier's diet was probably better than what the average American ate at that time).

NZ Vietnam War Roll Online. On 18 August 2011 the NZ Ministry for Culture and Heritage launched the revamped NZ Vietnam War Roll. Registered users can log in and leave comments and memories, upload content or make contact with other subscribers. The online roll is searchable by name, service number and unit and includes information on NZ visitors and civilians in Vietnam between 1964 and 1972. The roll also contains information on honours and awards, and NZ units in Vietnam. The roll can be accessed at www.vietnamwar.govt.nz.

Want to Visit a Weird Museum? Next time you happen to be in Boscastle, Cornwall, in the UK, don't forget to drop in to The Museum of Witchcraft. What is this doing in *Le Grogard* do you ask? Simple – the museum is based on material collected by famous British “Neopagan Witch” Cecil Williamson during his service with MI6 from 1938 to 1945 when he was employed by British military intelligence to research the occult leanings and interests of senior Nazis! When he was first contracted by MI6 in 1938 Williamson formed, with British taxpayer's money, the Witchcraft Research Centre and began assiduously collecting witchcraft related material. It may not have helped to shorten the war, but I am told it is a fascinating museum!

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.