



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



LE GROGNARD!

July 2012

Committee 2011/2012

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This Month's Branch Meeting:

Thursday 26 July, 2.30pm

***Canberra Southern Cross Club Jamison
Cnr Catchpole & Bowman Streets, Macquarie***

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Branch News: FOUR IMPORTANT MATTERS!

- 1. Please note the change of venue and time for this month's Branch meeting.**

The guest speaker will be Brigadier Gordon Murphy [Retd] who will talk about the New Georgia Campaign - a campaign where lots went wrong - and where the US 43rd Division managed to establish a World War 2 record for battle fatigue cases.

I hope that as many members, and visitors, as possible will make the effort to attend.

2. It's that time of year again - annual membership renewal time! The fee for Ordinary Membership has been maintained at \$40, and the fee for Family Membership has been reduced to the same amount - two for the price of one! You'll find a copy of the Membership Subscription Form elsewhere in this newsletter, and it is also available on the Society's Website.

3. Biennial Conference of the Military Historical Society of Australia - 2012 [Saturday 8 - Sunday 9 September 2012: *Hellenic Club in the City*, 13B Moore St, Canberra]. You'll find a copy of the Conference Registration Form elsewhere in this newsletter, and it is also available on the Society's Website. Places are limited, so please register at the earliest opportunity.

4. Next month's Branch meeting - 7pm, 28 August at the *Hellenic Club in the City* - will also be the Annual General Meeting for the Branch, at which time the election of office-bearers for the coming year will take place. Please make a point of attending, and help to determine the future strategy and forward program of the Branch.

As always, please let me know if you would like to give a presentation in the coming months, or can put forward the name of a suggested guest speaker. I'd also like to hear from you if there are any particular military history topics you might suggest that the Branch address at some point in the future.

Lastly, I recently learned that long-standing Branch member and former Federal Vice President Richard Murison died earlier this year. Vale Richard.

Ian Stagoll

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STOP PRESS - Biennial Conference of the Military Historical Society of Australia

PLEASE NOTE that this year's conference, which will be hosted by the ACT Branch, has been brought forward to Saturday 8 – Sunday 9 September 2012. [Originally scheduled for November the change has been made to enable participants, should they have an interest, to also attend the international history conference - "Kokoda: beyond the legend" - which will be held at the Australian War Memorial, Canberra on Thursday 6 - Friday 7 September 2012.]

No theme has been set for the Society's conference – it is hoped that a wide range of military history topics will be covered. Members who would be interested in presenting a paper at the conference should contact the ACT Branch President – Ian Stagoll [ian.stagoll@gmail.com].

The conference will be held at the *Hellenic Club in the City*, 13 Moore St, Canberra, which is at the same location as the former RSL Club where the year 2000 and 2002 Society's conferences were held.

The fee for the conference, and for the conference dinner to be held on the Saturday evening, has not yet been finally determined. However, it is anticipated that the total cost to financial members of the Society will not exceed \$100.

Further details, as well as the conference Registration Form, will be available shortly on the Society's website: http://mhsa.org.au/national_conferences.html

Ian Stagoll

INTREP

Military Quote of the Month

"Sire, I know the British; they will die on the ground on which they stand, rather than lose it."

Marshal Nicholas Jean de Dieu Soult
Waterloo, June 18, 1815, to Napoleon (who refused to believe him)

New Medal. On 19 July 2012 the Australian Government officially unveiled a new medal of recognition for Australia's defence force. The Australian Operational Service medal will recognise, amongst other things, ADF border protection work. Personnel involved on operations since 1997 including CRANBERRY, DIRK, STANHOPE, MISTRAL, TEEBONE, CELESTA, SUTTON, GEMSBOK, RELEX, RELEX II and RESOLUTE, will be eligible for the medal. The Australian Operational Service medal, will replace the Australian Active Service Medal and Australian Service Medal for new military operations; the AASM and ASM will be phased out as current operations wind up. Also for the first time, the medal regulations have been specifically written to recognise civilian contribution to military operations. The medal will be presented with a unique ribbon to identify individual operations.

We Always Do It This Way. One of Winston Churchill's honours was the Honorary Colonelcy of the Queen's Own Oxfordshire Hussars, the Yeomanry regiment he had joined and served with after he left the regular army; he was still Honorary Colonel of the QOOH at the time of his death in 1965. Churchill left detailed instructions for his funeral in the safe at the TA Centre, Oxford, and in these he included a special honour for the QOOH. Just as he had sent them to Flanders in 1914 and to France in 1944, so now he singled them out to have a prominent position immediately ahead of his coffin at the state funeral, in preference to many senior and more prestigious regiments. As the huge procession was forming up, however, the Brigade Major of the Brigade of Guards, aghast at this breach of protocol, stormed up to the officer commanding the QOOH detachment and told him his men were incorrectly arranged according to accepted protocol. In a response that would have warmed the cockles of Churchill's heart, the OC replied: "My dear chap, in the Oxfordshire Yeomanry we always do state funerals this way." (INTREP Comment: Just gotta love the Poms!)

Some 20th Century French Military Victories. Since their humiliating loss in the Franco-Prussian War in 1871, the French have gained a reputation for being continual losers

on the field of battle. This view has been especially prevalent among Americans, where it is an article of faith that France was so militarily incompetent that the USA has had to bail them out in two world wars. The French have been mercilessly pilloried in American popular culture, where the term “Cheese-eating surrender monkeys” became particularly popular after French criticism of the invasion of Iraq. But does this actually hold true? Granted, their military record in the 20th century is not an encouraging one. They were on the winning side in World War I, but lost so much blood and treasure in the process it can hardly be called a victory. They were humiliatingly defeated by Germany in a few short weeks in 1940 and spent 4 years under occupation. And they were in the end defeated in Indochina during the 1950s. However, the picture is not entirely gloomy. The French may not have won too many wars, but they managed to win a few individual battles along the way. Here are several battles the French did win during the 20th century:

The Marne, 1914: Undoubtedly the most significant French victory of the war and one which changed the course of it significantly. Between 5 and 12 September 1914, the French (with some British help) stopped the previously invincible Germans in their tracks and saved Paris. In a brilliantly planned counter-offensive, General Joseph Joffre exploited a weakness on the German right flank and pushed his forces between two German armies, causing the German offensive to break down in confusion. It was still a hard-fought battle, at one stage reinforcements for the French were brought from Paris in taxis, a feat which has become a major rallying point for French patriots ever since. However, the Germans came close to being surrounded and had to withdraw, effectively ending their chances of capturing Paris. They changed tactics and set themselves up for a war of attrition which would last for four bloody years. However, there is no doubt that the “Miracle of the Marne” saved France from certain defeat in 1914, and as such has assumed a sacred status in the annals of French military history.

Verdun, 1916-1917: Generally not considered a victory because of the enormously high losses on both sides, the fact is that the German offensive around Verdun failed to secure its twin objectives of capturing the city and inflicting crippling losses on the French. The city remained in French hands and French losses were not much higher than the Germans’ own. Along the way the French soldiers showed tremendous character and resolve to hold on even after the Germans seized the key forts of Vaux and Douaumont and inflict huge punishment on the German forces who paid heavily in blood for each metre they advanced. The battle comes to seem much more like a French victory when one considers the two little-known offensives which the French conducted in late 1916 and 1917, successfully recapturing virtually all the German gains and capturing some 11,000 German prisoners. Verdun has been described as France’s Stalingrad, which effectively captures both the horrendous slaughter and the refusal of the defenders to yield.

Bir Hakeim, 1942: After the fall of France in 1940, the first significant campaign for the Free French came in North Africa, where they fought first against their own Vichy countrymen, then against the Germans and Italians. In May 1942, the Free French came up against the might of Rommel’s Afrika Corp at Bir Hakeim, an oasis in the Libyan desert. Defending an old Turkish fort, the 1st Free French Division under General Marie Pierre Koenig held off the much larger German and Italian force for 14 days, before successfully evacuating under cover of darkness on 11 June. The action was significant because it delayed Rommel long enough for the British to re-group their forces. Although Rommel succeeded in capturing Tobruk 10 days later, Bir

Hakeim and other delaying actions were successful in giving the British the vital time needed to pull together the forces which eventually defeated Rommel at El Alamein in July.

Vinh Yen, 1951: Although the French campaign to defeat the Viet Minh in Indochina is generally regarded as a great military disaster, the French military did win some significant encounters along the way. Much like the Americans a decade later, the French usually proved too strong when the Viet Minh unwisely chose to fight in open battle rather than adhering to guerrilla tactics. Such a battle occurred in January 1951, when General Giap decided to make a major strike at Hanoi and chose to attack the French at Vinh Yen, 65 kilometers northwest of the city. The French had just brought in one of their most respected generals, Jean de Lattre de Tassigny, to bolster their flagging campaign, and he saw an immediate chance to strike a blow against the Viet Minh. He was flown in on 14 January to personally take charge of the Vinh Yen garrison. He ordered a series of successful counterattacks against the Viet Minh, driving them back from territory that they had captured and then ordered the largest napalm attack of the war. Devastated, the Viet Minh tried to fight back, but by 17 January, Giap admitted defeat and the remaining Viet Minh fled for their mountain strongholds. Ultimately the Viet Minh learnt they could not defeat the French in open battle and returned to their successful guerrilla tactics, until the great disaster of Dien Bien Phu in 1954 ended the French campaign

Heartbreak Ridge, 1951: Due to their commitments in Indochina, the French could send only one battalion to fight in Korea; however, the specially-formed battalion of active and reserve soldiers proved to be one of the better units in the UN force and won praise, especially from the Americans, for their heroics in several battles, particularly in the month-long battle of Heartbreak Ridge in September and October of 1951. In conjunction with the American 23rd Infantry Regiment, the French were ordered to make a near suicidal attack up a heavily defended ridge. They reached the top after sustaining heavy casualties, but then had to endure repeated counter-attacks by the North Koreans. The battle grew larger in scale, drawing in American tank regiments and South Korean soldiers for the Allies, and Chinese troops on the Communist side, but it was the French who finally delivered the coup de grace, capturing the last Communist position on 13 October. The French battalion lost several hundred men, and was awarded a distinguished unit citation, one of 3 they won in the course of the war, by the grateful Americans.

Tallyho Ginger? Marshal of the Royal Air Force Hugh Dowding, who, as AOC Fighter Command, commanded “The Few” during the Battle of Britain, was a champion skier and a vegetarian. He was also, believe it or not, a member of both the Fairy Investigation Society and the Ghost Club, and a spiritualist who believed he communed with his late wife and his dead airmen.

Someone Has to Be First. The first major warship sunk in action by air attack was the 7,700 ton German light cruiser *Königsberg*, sunk by Royal Navy Skua dive bombers in the harbor of Bergen, Norway, on 10 April 1940.

US Army “Dog Tags”. Identity tags or discs, referred to by Americans as “dog tags”, were officially introduced into the US Army on 20 December 1906; at this stage just a single disc. A second tag, giving each soldier a pair of tags, was officially introduced on 6 July 1916. The US Army officially introduced the “Army Serial Number” on 12 February 1918; the

mass expansion of the Army to meet the demands of the First World War presented the Army with the problem of differentiating between thousands, in some cases tens of thousands, of men with identical names and a unique number for each man was the solution. In October 1938 the US Army commenced trials related to the introduction of a new identity tag and in 1940 adopted the familiar TAG, IDENTIFICATION, M-1940 (Stock No. 74-T-60); this was complemented in 1943 by the NECKLACE & EXTENSION, TAG, IDENTIFICATION, M-1940 (Stock No. 74-N-300). In December 1940, the US Army had to make a choice between brass or monel – they chose monel, an alloy of brass and nickel, because nickel was on the list of critical items and the alloy allowed supplies to be “stretched”. Brass was used as a substitute standard in mid-1941, but by the end of 1942 due to a large growth of the US Armed Forces, there was a shortage of both brass and monel, and now also brass was on the shortage list of critical items; so the Army had to look again for another solution and by the end March 1942, stainless steel became the substitute material. Although steel was also on the critical list, it was somehow still available in fairly larger quantity (as compared to some other raw materials) for other applications like identity tags. Because of the continuous evolution in war industry, material shortages of different metals and/or metal alloys appeared on several occasions, whereby the Army still issued smaller lots of steel and monel Identification Tags (quantities still available in some depots), this variety in production only stopped end 1943 - early 1944, when production reverted only to stainless steel.



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 249, Jamison Centre ACT 2614, or visit the Society's website: www.mhsa.org.au.



Military Historical Society of Australia

Australian Business Number (ABN) 97 764 781 363

ACT Branch

ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP SUBSCRIPTION [1 July 2012 to 30 June 2013]

Ordinary Membership [including Family Membership - a couple domiciled at the same address]: \$40

MEMBERSHIP SUBSCRIPTION FORM

Surname:

Given Name[s]: Title:

Postal Address:

..... Postcode:

Telephone: [H] [W] [Mobile]

Email Address: Date of joining the Society:

Military History Interests:

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I understand my details will only be used by the ACT Branch and the Federal Secretary of the Society to maintain correct records of my membership and for general administrative business, and by the Editor of the Society's Journal [*Sabretache*] for distribution purposes. I understand that the Society's constitution requires the Federal Secretary to maintain a membership register [including the *Sabretache* distribution address list].

In addition to information kept for those purposes:

I agree to my email details being included on the Federal Secretary's Econtact List which will be used solely to disseminate Society business and convey items of interest to members [including members' notices]: YES/NO

I wish to be included on the Members' Interests Register and give permission for my military history interests and my contact details to be included on the register: YES/NO

I understand that, at any time, I can revoke this permission for inclusion on the Federal Secretary's Econtact List and/or Members' Interests Register.

Please send the completed membership subscription form, together with Cheque/Money Order to:

ACT Branch Secretary, Military Historical Society of Australia
PO Box 249, Jamison Centre ACT 2614

OR: Pay by direct deposit to MHSA ACT Branch Account: BSB Number 633-000, Account Number 144-324-712. [Reference details should include full name, suburb/town and postcode.]

AND: Forward the completed membership subscription form, together with a copy of the direct deposit receipt to:

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Military Historical Society of Australia

Biennial Conference of the Military Historical Society of Australia - 2012

Saturday 8 - Sunday 9 September 2012: *Hellenic Club in the City*, 13B Moore St, Canberra

Anyone interested in presenting a paper at the conference should contact the ACT Branch President Ian Stagoll [ian.stagoll@gmail.com]. Fees for the conference have been kept to a minimum:

Society Member: \$30

Non-Member: \$65 [includes 12 months subscription to the Society's Journal - *Sabretache*]

Please note the cost of lunches is not covered by the conference fee, and thus will be at personal expense. The Club Bistro offers a good selection of meals within a price range of around \$10 to \$18.

Optional Conference Dinner: \$35

The dinner, which on this occasion will be informal, will be on the Saturday evening from 7.30pm at the ***O'Stratos Greek Taverna***, 9 Lonsdale St, Braddon [approx. 350 metres from the conference venue]. On offer will be a banquet menu, served at table, comprising entrees, salads, four main dishes, dessert, and tea or coffee. Again, please note that the cost of beer/wine/spirits/soft drinks is not included as part of the banquet menu and thus will be at personal expense.

CONFERENCE REGISTRATION FORM

Surname:
Given Name[s]: Title:
Postal Address:
..... Postcode:
Telephone: [H] [W] [Mobile]
Email Address:

I am a Life Member/Fellow of the Society	\$30
I am a Corresponding Member of the Society	\$30
I am a Member of the	Branch of the Society \$30
I am not currently a Member of the Society	\$65
I wish/do not wish to attend the optional Conference Dinner	\$35
I wish/do not wish to bring a guest to the Conference Dinner	\$35
TOTAL	\$.....

Please send the completed registration form, together with Cheque/Money Order to:
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