

NATIONAL BIENNIAL CONFERENCES

THE 2008 BIENNIAL CONFERENCE, PERTH - FINAL CONFERENCE REPORT

I believe I speak for the WA Branch sub-committee following the successful completion of the 2008 50th Jubilee Celebration conference when I sum up in one word - whew!

An absolutely fantastic time was had by all over the Easter long weekend of the 21st through to 24th March with all aspects of the event coming together in a way that exceeded many of our own hopes and expectations. The conference kicked off in a truly festive manner on the Friday evening at the combined Officers' and Sergeants' Mess of the Western Australian University Regiment located at the historic Artillery Barracks in Fremantle. The evening offered all delegates and some partners the opportunity to reacquaint with old friends and new friends alike in a welcoming yet fitting environment, suitably decorated with members' own collectables adorning walls and fresh cut flowers tastefully displayed. Sustenance of both the solid and liquid forms was abundant and both were consumed heartily throughout the evening. Enough said on that particular point!

The official proceedings commenced on Saturday morning in the Lecture Room of the Western Australian University Regiment with the appropriate opening address by our society's patron. We promptly launched into the presentation of papers, the backbone of any conference, and all delegates were treated to a broad cross section of military history, presented in a variety of ways, however all showing a great degree of research, enthusiasm and professionalism in delivery.

Appropriate breaks in the program allowed sufficient time for delegates to congregate outside on the upper veranda of the historic venue while sampling the home baked delights and refreshments on offer. Luncheon was taken back at the scene of the previous night's crimes where members who had brought militaria and memorabilia to display gave a brief prece of their items while our patron perused the displays, searching for a worthy recipient of the branch's "Peter Shaw Trophy" for best display. Having been the inaugural recipient of said trophy I must cease referring to it as a memorial trophy at this time as all delegates at least, would be aware of Peter Shaw's continuing longevity in this world, born out by his eventual receipt of the trophy for his own display on Australian regimental badges and insignia – a worthy recipient of his own award!

The day continued with further papers and breaks for additional refreshments – comments about expanding waist lines commenced the night before and the theme continued throughout the conference. Upon close of papers, delegates were transported to their various accommodations where ablutions were completed in readiness for the traditional Conference Dinner. Held this time at the Officer's Mess at Leeuwin Barracks, the venue lived up to all expectations as sunset was enjoyed on the banks of the Swan River while sipping a beverage from the complimentary pre-dinner drinks selection. This atmosphere was promptly punctuated at nineteen hundred hours by the onslaught of a kilted piper's weapon of choice as we were marched from the ante room into the main dining mess resplendent with mess silverware and tri-colour candles. Upon all entering the room, we were instructed to be seated by the Mess President and so began an evening of a quasi-ceremonial Regimental Dining In Night with many observances to pomp and tradition that added a tremendous degree of

atmosphere to proceedings. Part way through the evening a donation in the form of a cheque was presented to the Chairman of the Army Museum of Western Australia Foundation, Mr. Tom Goode in appreciation of the museum's sponsorship of the MHSA's Biennial Conference at its venue. This was then followed by the granting of Life Membership's on two of Western Australia's own, Branch President Pat Hall and Secretary Rhonda Grande, justly rewarding their continued long service to the branch and the greater society as a whole. From all reports the evening was a huge success however I am most grateful that my expecting bride was there to chaperone me home in a tidy fashion and at a respectable hour.

Sunday's proceedings continued back at the Army Museum of WA with a guided tour of the museum that included not only the displays that the public sees but also a behind the scenes visit to the curatorial sections of the establishment where various treasures undergoing restoration and preservation were viewed with much delight by the delegates. This was followed by the resumption of papers and we continued to be entertained and educated by all speakers who displayed yet again great depth of knowledge and understanding of their chosen topics. A Research in Progress segment provided delegates with the opportunity to present a brief update on the status of their current projects while also appealing for information that could assist in the further development of the research. Upon close of papers the opportunity was taken to proceed as a group down stairs where a photographer was organised to take photos of all delegates and branch groups, complimentary copies of which will be out at branches by the time this goes to press.

Monday saw the conference drawn to a close with the official thanks and passing of the baton to the Victorian Branch for the 2010 conference. This was followed by a member's own buy and sell session back in the Western Australian University Regiment Combined Mess followed by lengthy farewells as the 50 or so conference delegates gradually departed the venue, some heading home and some choosing to continue their stay in WA with a visit to family and friends. As the last delegates left, branch members promptly brought the venue back into shape with some judicious packing, cleaning and moving of furniture and similar items before adjourning back to the mess for a sit down and well-earned cleansing ale.

My sincere thanks to the sub-committee members Rhonda Grande, Steve Danaher, Wayne Gardiner, Brian Inglis, Peter Shaw and Branch President Pat Hall for the constant support and assistance offered throughout the last two years. Also special thanks to our corporate sponsors, particularly Honda North of Wanneroo and our private sponsors as well. Lastly however I would like to thank all delegates for without you there would have been no conference and to those who presented, I especially thank you for making the 50th Jubilee conference one I am sure will be remembered with great pleasure by all who attended. Over to you Victoria!

Paul Hamilton
2008 Biennial Conference Convenor