

26 Battalion Association
Victorian Branch

26 AUST. INF. BN. (AIF) "NEVER UNPREPARED"

NEWSLETTER

April 2009

ISSUE 14



*A Company less 8 Platoon on Tanahmerah airstrip, Dutch New Guinea, May 1943
OC Captain Graham Searles is on the end, rear right.*

WELCOME TO NEWSLETTER No. 14

WELCOME to the latest issue of 26 Battalion Reunion Association, Victorian Branch newsletter.

Those members who have contributed to this edition have made it into a bumper Newsletter. Thank you for your support.

Any additional material sent to me for future editions would be most appreciated.

- Norm Turrell

GREAT NEWS! OUR BOOK REPRINTED

DUE to high demand, the official 26th Battalion book by A. N (Norm) Turrell titled *Never Unprepared: a history of the 26th Australian Infantry Battalion (AIF), 1939-1946* has now been reprinted.

Over 3,300 men passed through the ranks of the 26 Australian Infantry Battalion (AIF) from its start as a Militia Battalion.

Within days of launching the first edition of *Never Unprepared*, and despite intensive research, many

mates' names were found to be missing from the Nominal Roll.

Often it was found that nicknames were commonly used rather than given names, making it difficult to compare against official documentation.

This second edition addresses some of those issues and makes corrections wherever mistakes crept in.

It has some extra photographs and mentions a few more names that have

been identified since it was first published in 1992.

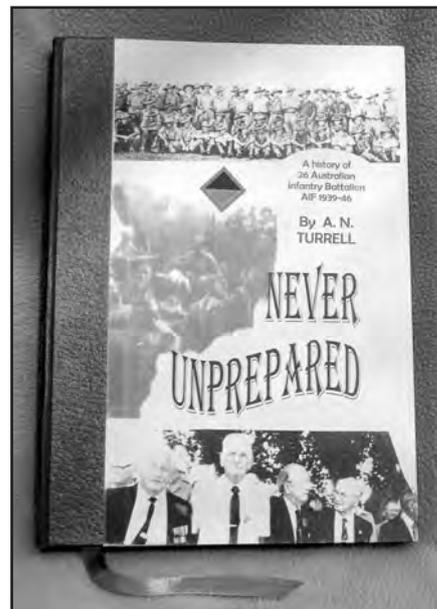
The dust jacket has been removed and the hardcover has been redesigned. It is physically bigger and the text is slightly larger than the first edition.

The cost of the book is \$60.00 plus \$5.00 postage. If you would like to purchase a copy, please write a cheque for **\$65.00** payable to **"26 Battalion Reunion Association, Book Account"** and post to

either Bob Gaudion or Norm Turrell at the address on the front page of this newsletter.

Second Edition Details:

Turrell, A. N.
 Never Unprepared: a History of the 26th Australian Infantry Battalion (AIF), 1939-1946
 ISBN 0646084976
 First published 1992.
 Second Edition 2008.
 Hard cover
 194 pages plus addendum
 7" wide x 9 3/4" high x 3/4" deep



The official book *Never Unprepared* has brought veterans from all states together; it has filled the gap between 25th and 27th Battalion books on the Australian War Memorial (AWM) library shelves; it has been welcomed by military history collectors; it has generated interest to continue activity in the 26 Battalion Association which founded this Newsletter and installed 26 Bn memorial plaques; it has imparted knowledge to individuals nationally and overseas; it has inspired a website concentrating on 26 Battalion Association; it has indirectly commenced a younger generation of e-mail communications; it has started a Wikipedia web page for 26th Battalion (Australia) which expanded to include WW1; but more importantly it remembers the ordinary men leading normal lives who had the courage to defend this country and it honours those who never came home.

This book will be available for generations to come. We thank the author for his dedication, determination and persistence in making the official book happen.

Lt A N (Norm) Turrell we salute you!

OUR official website has just been updated too. It has some more photos, details of the book and a few more links. Typing "26th Battalion Association" into Google using the quotation marks (which keeps the text together) will assist in quickly finding the site. Our website address is: **<http://26bn.org>**

26th Battalion is now mentioned on the electronic online encyclopaedia known as "Wikipedia". Extracted from the official book and used with the author's permission, a Wikipedia web page for 26th Battalion in WW2 has now been created. The web page gives a summary of events of the battalion during both World War 1 and World War 2.

You can find it here: **[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/26th_Battalion_\(Australia\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/26th_Battalion_(Australia))**

If you would like to join our electronic mailing list just send a short email to:

Webmaster26Bn@gmail.com



SIG. PL. FOOTY TEAM

Left: Signal Platoon football team, Bougainville, 1945

Cec Ridley, Col Kiely, Marty O'Dea, John Maschmedt, Norm Downey, Fred McManus, Laurie Hill, Cec Stacey, Jack Carter, Ray Bennett, Arthur Watts, Bill Mitchell, Geo Nankivell and Frank Norton.

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

By BOB GAUDION

Ladies and gentlemen,
Welcome to 26 Battalion
Reunion Association, Vic-
torian Branch newsletter
April 2009.

New Members

The following are new
members of our Association
are warmly welcomed to
our membership.

Noel MacKay (Signals
Platoon) who lives in
Kurunjang, Vic. **Gordon
Hardy** who lives in Oak
Park, Vic. **Gifford Herbert**
who lives in Bunderberg,
Queensland.

Would you please make
these new members very
welcome to our Association
when you have the
opportunity.

ANZAC Day 2009

The form-up point for
this year's ANZAC Day
march is in Flinders Street
West, opposite VRI hall,
near Degraives St. Please
form-up as from 10.00 am
with a potential move-off
time of 10.35 am. There
will be plenty of cars
available for those to ride
in who cannot walk the full
distance of the march.

Unit History Book

Reprint copies of
26 Battalion unit history
book *Never Unprepared*
which includes 12 extra
pages of recent photographs
and a list of known recently
deceased members are
now available. See details
opposite (p2.) Please make
cheques or money orders
payable to '26 Battalion
Reunion Association, Book
Account"

March Leader 2009

We are very pleased to
advise that the leader
of our contingent in
this year's ANZAC Day
Melbourne march is
our Vice President, **Jeff
Collings**. Jeff is honouring
the service of his father
with 26 Battalion during
World War 2.

Special Thanks

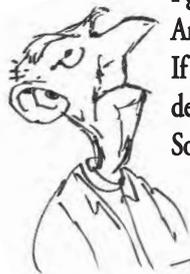
This edition we have
special thanks for
Louden Cochrane who
has forwarded his life
story which is printed
on page 6. Well done
Louden. Thanks also to
Peter Millyn for his uncle's
story on page 5.

Once again, we have to
thank Norman Turrell
for his editing of this
newsletter and Colin Block
for producing the copy for
forwarding to members.
Thank you, gentlemen for
your fine efforts.

Best Wishes

Finally, very warm wishes
to all those members who
are ailing and are unable
to attend Anzac Day
Parades. May we please
express our very kindest
wishes for all your good
health and happiness.

Kindest regards
Bob Gaudion



SMILE

Ode to Youth

There is nothing the matter with me.
I'm as healthy as I can be.
I have arthritis in both my knees
And when I talk, I talk with a wheeze.

My pulse is weak, and my blood is thin
But I'm awfully well for the shape I'm in.
Arch supports I have for my feet
Or I wouldn't be able to be on the street.

Sleep is denied me night after night,
But every morning I find I'm all right.
My memory is failing, my head's in a spin
But I'm awfully well for the shape I'm in.

The moral is this, as my tale I unfold,
That for you and me who are growing old,
It's better to say "I'm fine" with a grin
Than to let folks know the shape we are in.

How do I know that my youth is all spent?
Well, my "get up and go" just got up and went.
But I really don't mind when I think with a
grin
Of all the grand places my "get up" has been.

Old age is golden, I've heard it said;
But sometimes I wonder as I get into bed
With my ears in the drawer my teeth in a cup,
My eyes on the table until I wake up.

Ere sleep overtakes me, I say to myself,
"Is there anything else I could lay on the shelf?"
When I was young my slippers were red,
I could kick my heels over my head

When I was older my slippers were blue,
But I still could dance the whole night through.
Now I am old, my slippers are black,
I walk to the store and puff my way back.

I get up each morning and dust off my wits
And pick up the paper and read the obits.
If my name is still missing, I know I'm not
dead
So I fix me some breakfast and go back to bed.

ST ALBAN'S CHAPEL STAINED-GLASS WINDOW

The beautiful stained-glass windows, found in the Chapel of St Alban at The Southport School on Queensland's Gold Coast, hold historical significance not only to the school and the community, but also to our own 26 Battalion.

The Southport School is an Anglican school on the Gold Coast in Winchester Street.

Its Chapel of St Albans stands in the picturesque grounds of the school. It was completed in 1921 and serves as a permanent memorial of the self sacrifice of the three hundred Old Boys who gave, some their lives, and all their services, to the Empire and Country in the hour of greatest need.

Holding most significance to the 26 Battalion is the stained-glass window number eleven, titled "Resurrection", that is located on the western side of St Alban's Chapel.

It was presented to the school in memory of **John Winzar Compton**, a member from 1926 to 1928. A soldier in 26 Battalion AIF, Compton was killed in action at Compton River on the North East Coast of the Solomon Islands during World War II on March 14, 1945. He was the brother of the Rev C M Compton who was School Chaplain from 1945 to 1951. The school's founder, Bishop Horace Dixon, dedicated the window in 1949.

It was designed by William Bustard who created many of church stained-glass windows, but his most impressive would have to be the memorial in the Catholic Star of the Sea Cathedral, Darwin, to those who died in the Japanese air raid in 1942. Through his personal insistence on strong supports, the window remained undamaged in the 1974 cyclone.



Above: Window No. 11 "Resurrection" in memory of John Compton (26 Battalion).

Below: The Southport School clocktower with St Alban's Chapel on the right.



MOPPING UP

PPETER MILLYNN found a poem called “Mopping Up” in his late uncle’s papers. His uncle, **Paul Maher**, enlisted in the 26 Battalion in 1942 and in the eighties he wrote the poem down from his memory.

Peter says of his uncle, “He was one of the strongest, smartest, kindest men who I have ever met. My Dad passed away when I was 20 and having Paul in my life was a Godsend.”

Like many veterans Paul returned from the war profoundly affected by his experiences.

“Initially taking up a small soldier settlement near Griffith, that he was unable to make a go of, he went to the Northern Territory where he lived a solitary life as a stockman until ill health brought him to Sydney,” he said.

“On his retirement he travelled the country in his old ute ... still unable to settle down. During that time he wrote of many of his experiences with the 26th and I recall as a small boy flipping through many such stories with wide eyes. Sadly he was camped at the Menindee Lakes during a flood in the 70s and all of his papers were destroyed. Even more distressing was the fact that he simply didn’t have the heart to rewrite that which was lost.”

A piece in the book *Never Unprepared* only survived because Peter’s father, a regular army officer and keen military historian, had submitted it as the first instalment in a series of articles for the NSW Military Historical Society magazine *Dispatch*.

Peter continues, “When he died one of his mates from the 26th sent me a card that said simply that Paul was ‘a good friend, a good soldier who could always be depended on in a tight spot’. These men share a bond that is almost incomprehensible in our day and age.”

The discovered poem (right) certainly sums up the frustration felt by the 26th at the perceptions back home of what they were engaged in! It was attributed to author Black Bob who possibly was Lieutenant Adrian O’Neill of 38 Battalion.



Bougainville, 24 May 1945. A patrol from D Company, 26 Infantry Battalion, moving through Kunai grass in the Ruri Bay Area, North Bougainville. Troops of 11 Infantry Brigade have been engaged in mopping up the Buka Passage area. Photo courtesy: AWM

Mopping Up

Bougainville 1944-45

We’ve nineteen dead on the Buin Road
Ten more on the jungle track
And all day long there’s a broken tide
Of our wounded streaming back.
We’ve fought all night by the Hongorai
With never a bite or sup
And tomorrow’s back-page news will quote
‘Our soldiers are mopping-up’.

As dawn wakes with a jaded eye
Discarding it’s misty pall
White crosses mourn on the Numa trail
For fellows who gave their all
In Tsimba’s ridges, Soroken’s groves
They drained the dregs, Hell’s cup
The blood they gave was a passing thing
They merely were ‘mopping-up’

The screaming silence of ambushed swamp
The horror of obscene bog
The vicious foe in a filthy league
With blanketing rain and fog
Are trifling things the critics know
Should never hold heroes up
Good Lord! This isn’t even war at all
We’re simply ‘mopping up’

We make no claim to heroic mould
But this little boon we ask:
Those armchair critics please send up
To share our simple task
When they are on intimate terms with death
And have tallied the blood cost up
Maybe they’ll coin a more adequate phrase
Than a casual ‘mopping up’

“Black Bob”

WA MEMBER

Corporal Louden Cochrane WX 41166

Louden tried to join the army as a 17 year old but eventually joined up when he turned 18. In 1943 he enlisted in 25 Aust Cav Trg Sqn and after a series of moves from training

gun P1 and remembers men like Arthur Ennis, Tony Murray, Ernie Hill and Bob Backhouse.

Louden served in all the campaigns in Bougainville

he was able to obtain a farm at Duranillin in the wheatbelt region of Western Australia, 200km from Perth.

In 1948 he married Laura, had four sons and one daughter.

He worked his farm for 42 years and retired in 1989 and his sons took over the farm. Louden and Laura now live nearby.

They are both very active. He is a keen bowler and has bowled for 60 years representing WA State side level and RSL teams.

Louden is our most distant former member of 26 Battalion but is a staunch supporter of our Association and is a life member. Well done Louden. Keep your eye on the Jack.



*Left and above:
Louden Cochrane, then and now*

battalions went to 10th Aust Light Horse Regt.

After this unit was disbanded he was sent to Canungra for jungle training and finally joined 26 Battalion in November 1944 and sailed with the unit to Bougainville.

He served in the Vickers

and went to Rabaul as part of the occupation force. While there he studied wool classing and achieved his certificate.

Promoted to Corporal in 1945 he was among the last men to leave Rabaul and arrived in Sydney in June 1946.

He was only 22 at the time of his discharge in July and

SOME PHOTOS FROM MEMBERS



David Watt and Norm Snell

VALE

It is with regret we record the passing of **Bob Dryburgh** in June 2007.

Bob lived in Echuca for many years with his wife Patricia and family, former members will remember Bob for his athletic skills as a footballer and runner.

He visited Melbourne on one occasion for the Anzac Day Parade but later ill health prevented him from travel away from home.

LEST WE FORGET



*Reunion of three Signallers from
26 Battalion.
They are Keith Locke, David Watt
and Nobby Clarke.*

VALE

IT IS with great regret we record the passing of QX 43786 **Sgt Norman Downey BEM**. Norm died, aged 88, on 4 March 2009 after a long illness.

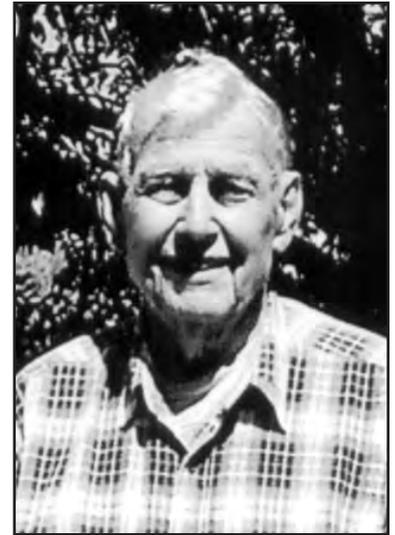
Norm grew up in Julia Creek, Queensland and upon his retirement moved to Rowes Bay, near Townsville with his wife Marcella. They settled in to the RSL Villas and made many friends, he once told me he wished he had done this sooner as it was so good. He swam daily at the beach opposite to keep fit.

He was one of the original members of 26 Bn, was promoted from Cpl to L/Sgt in April 1943. He became the senior Sgt of the signals platoon in April 1945 and was highly respected by all ranks. Prior to the end of the war he was listed for his officer's commission but was denied what he deserved because the war ended suddenly.

He served in all the campaigns, including Rabaul, taking early discharge. His old mate David Watt took over as platoon sergeant. Norm attended the unit reunion in May 1992 meeting up with many of his former comrades.

Sgt Downey was responsible for the complete overhaul of the previous signal system and duly arranged for the installation of 55 miles of wire which reached from Corps to Pl level which was quite some achievement. Added

This recent photo of Norm Downey was taken in August 2008



to that was the recovery of some twenty-five miles of wire which was serviced for future use. For his outstanding effort to install and maintain these lines of communication in such difficult terrain he was awarded the British Empire Member medal.

His Citation reads as follow, "For specially distinguished service of the highest standard as acting Signals officer of 26 Battalion during operations May and June 1944 he assumed the duties of the signals officer who was absent. Communication and maintenance was needed over a front of 8000 yards. This system was used by other units which took over as they advanced forward. By his discharge of duty far above the ordinary he was responsible for the success of the operations of the Battalion."

Well done indeed, Sgt Norman Downey BEM. You will be sadly missed Old Mate.

By Lt Norman Turrell former Signals officer 26 Battalion.



Chabai/Soraken Area, Bougainville, 16 June 1945. A dug-in signal switchboard at 26 Infantry Battalion Tactical Headquarters. Sgt Norman Downey is working behind Signalman Faehrman.

Photo: AWM

V LE

Norm Downey
George Sills
Bob Dryburg
Cy Russell

FAREWELL GEORGE

Sgt. George Thomas Sills, OAM
1921-2009

Better known to many as Manny, George was born in Camowéal on January 16, 1921 to George and Esther Sills.

He had one sister Sylvia, who was seven years his senior. His family moved to Julia Creek to live on Hilton Park, a small property on the outskirts of town in 1922. His parents worked a vegetable patch and his mother sold vegetables, transporting these through the streets of Julia Creek by horse and cart.

He started school in Julia Creek in 1926 and had happy memories of his school days with friends like Joe Mathews and Norm Downey. He left school at age 13. After leaving school he worked as a horse trainer, in a grocery store and did some kangaroo shooting with his father.

George joined the Army in 1941 and was lucky enough to have his friend **Norm Downey** in the same company. He became sergeant and served in Bougainville. The war was a difficult time for him and the most important part were the long-lasting friendships that he formed. We remember he loved to tell the story of an Army doctor (a mate of his) who told him, you could drink more if you had your tonsils out – so they came out! George was also well known by many of his army mates for organising games including ‘two up’ and ‘crown and anchor’.

George was discharged from the Army in 1945 and when he returned to Australia he boarded a train from Brisbane to Julia Creek with 3 shillings in his pocket. When he arrived back in Julia Creek, he put this money on a horse and won. This was the money he used to start his new life.

George met Hazel in Julia Creek in 1946 when she was working at Gannons Hotel. They married in 1947 and were happily married for 62 very special years. They had seven children, nine grandchildren and nine great grandchildren, with one on the way. These people were the joy of his life. George always spoke very sternly to his grandchildren about the important role they had in producing more great grandchildren for him.

After the war, George started a fruit shed with a business partner. Eventually George and Hazel took over the business and with Hazel's help George turned it into a very successful venture. Many of you will remember his fruit shop in Quarrell Street. At the end of the day George liked to sit outside and share stories with the locals. He retired from the fruit shop in 1984 and decided to commit himself exclusively to community work and his ever growing family.

George has been an exceptionally committed member of the Julia Creek community for many many years and always did what he

thought was best for the town. He loved this place and had no desire to live anywhere else. George has been recognised with many awards over the years for his community work, which he was always very proud and humbled to receive. He is the only man in town to hold a membership at the Country Women's Association!

George was also known as a handy carpenter and helped many of his children build their homes, until his eyesight faded and wouldn't allow him to do this anymore. He passed many of these skills onto his children.

The thing that we will remember most about George is his love of his family. Regardless of what we did he was always very forgiving. He was proud of each and every one of his family whatever they decided to do in their lives, he would support them all the way.

George passed away on February 24, 2009 in Townsville Hospital. He was surrounded by family on his last day and we know he would be pleased to be back home now.

His family are so proud of him and the life he has lived. He is a true gentleman and will be a great role model to all of them for as long as they live. His values of hard work, his love of family and community have carried him a long way.

He was a committee member of Scouts, RSL, Lions, Parents and Citizens, Historical Society, and club member of Rodeo, Football, Gymkhana and Boxing. George's awards include the Order of Australia for services to Julia Creek, Senior Citizenship Award, Australia Day Premier's Award for services to the community and the Lions Club Humanitarian Award.

We will miss you George – you will never be forgotten.

Eulogy provided by the family and printed in 'The North West Star'

Left: George with his long time companion and wife Hazel. The couple were married for 62 years and raised seven children in Julia Creek.

Photo: The North West Star, 5 Mar '09

