

26 Battalion Association
Victorian Branch

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

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NEWSLETTER

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ISSUE 16



*Tsimba area, Bougainville Island. Feb 21, 1945. Troops of B Company, 26th Infantry Battalion moving from Puto Beach towards the area occupied by the 31/51st Infantry Battalion where they are to take over from that unit. Those identified are Pte. J.S. O'Donnell, Pte. N.A.R. Scharenberg, Pte. G.Tasker and Pte. J. Corderoy.
AWM079159*

WELCOME TO NEWSLETTER No. 16

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

Thanks to all those members who have contributed to this Newsletter.

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

- Colin Block

THIS ANZAC DAY, 2010

Veterans are encouraged to travel in a car provided

Last ANZAC Day in 2009 confirmed the fears of the ANZAC Day Commemoration Council that the majority of Veterans from WW 2 now have great difficulty in completing the 1.8km Commemoration March.

A meeting at ANZAC House discussed shortening the length of the March and decided to leave the March

unchanged, but it carefully considered making it easier for WW2 veterans. It was recorded in the Minutes, "These WW2 Veterans will be mounted on vehicles and the vehicles will move with each Unit Association in order of the March"

"WW2 Unit Associations will continue to have descendants of Veterans, now deceased, march immediately behind vehicles

carrying WW2 Veterans.”

The ANZAC Day Commemoration Council strongly urges all WW2 Veterans who wish to participate in 2010 to accept the offer to ride in a vehicle. For the 26th Battalion these vehicles will be available between 9.30am and 10.00 am opposite Flinders Street Station, on the corner of Degraives St. We will start marching at 10.35 am and descendants will march behind the vehicles.

As in previous years, former 26th Battalion Veterans and descendants are invited to attend the 2010 ANZAC Day March to remember those who fought to defend this country and those who never came home.

We especially welcome descendants and those who would like to represent a loved one who is no longer with us. Anzac House has asked us to ensure that children under the age of 14 years and prams and pushers are not permitted to take place in the March. Anzac House has also advised the following:

- Attire should be neat & tidy out of respect for the fallen
 - Carrying pictures of relatives is NOT supported
 - Descendants are to wear medals on the right breast (left breast is reserved for the original owners)
- We are pleased to advise that there will be adequate transport for this year's march for all veterans.

After the Commemorative March, at around noon, we will return to Bell's Hotel, Cnr Moray Street & Coventry Street, South Melbourne (Melway ref: 57 H1). We invite you, along with your family and friends to join us for a meal and catch up.

The Four Musketeers of 15/26 Bn

IN 1934 the **26th Battalion** was merged with the 15th to become the 15/26th Battalion and later, in 1939, it was detached when the new 26th Battalion did their training in Queensland. Rodney Harper was looking for information about his father, Norman Harper who was a private in the 15/26 Battalion in 1938 and he did not know much about him other than the fact that he won first place in the elimination shoot at Redbank which was organised by B Company,



Newspaper photo of Pte. Norman Harper

News article at the time:

“Youthful members of B Company (Manly) secured the three first positions in the rifle elimination test, conducted at Redbank yesterday morning by officers of the 15/26th Battalion to select a unit representative for the Commonwealth Military Forces King's Medal Competition. The winner was private N.A. Harper, and the runners-up were Privates J.B. Kennedy and K.A. Gardiner. They shot like veterans, and Harper's success was particularly meritorious, as he was the youngest of the competition.”

Manly, in 1938. He went on to be placed 3rd in the SQRA King's medal competition.

Then one day last year Rod received an email from the author of *Love War and Letters – 1940-45* by Alan Hooper. Alan was a mate of Norm's and other friends Jeff Kennedy and Ken Gardiner and called themselves The Four Musketeers.

Alan's email to Rod gave him some insight into his dad's life. This is part of what was written:-

“You see in the given year 1938 a snapshot appears in my photo album of three pipe-smoking musketeers arms over one another's shoulders. The tall one is J. (Jeff) B. Kennedy the short one K. (Ken) A. Gardiner and of medium build is me, Alan E. Hooper.

We three and your dad, Norm Harper joined the part time militia in 1934 as privates as mentioned in my book, *Love War & Letters – 1940-45*, so there is no need to repeat.

Within a year we three wore the crossed rifles badge on our sleeves and I was promoted corporal. At the Manly Memorial Park drill hall we three excelled in small bore musketry, Lewis gun stripping, and drill.

Jeff and I put on boxing gloves and sparred with wooden swords. W.O. Bullis taught Jeff and me dancing in his worn out lino covered kitchen floor on Saturday nights and how to partner his lovely daughter upon her and her mother's return from the *Star Theatre*. Your dad would have attended the weekly drill hall

The Four Musketeers of 15/26 Battalion (cont.)

dances with us.

All four musketeers spent many a Saturday afternoon at Enoggera 1000X rifle range; we competed against other army units with open sights and were chosen to shoot at Toowoomba against a regional team.

Prize money from annual competition came in handy. When I bought a 2-stroke Vellolette and Norm bought a BSA (I think) we became independent of Fred Parfitt's wood truck.

Ken, when he wasn't singing under Monte on the 4BC choir, "...with 'is 'ed tooked underneath 'is arm - 'e walked the bloody tow-w-er", he rode around in his flash Calthorpe that nearly gave him a hernia each time he kicked it, and kicked it, to life. Jeff was my pillion passenger week-ends.

My book tells about Jeff and I fishing behind Green Is. at dawn on winter mornings and with the O'Neill girls occasionally in summer.

First the depression then war blighted our otherwise carefree lives. I lost track of Norm when Jeff's and my courting became serious but saw much of each other during the three months compulsory camp Feb-April, 1942. We remained mates but were never as close as Jeff had been.

At one time Norm had the keys to his employer's surgical instrument company's city premises. With the X-Ray machines turned on we checked out our lungs, feet and cobblers' heads. Looking at the silver stallions used in colonoscopies and umbrellas to treat VD was sufficient warning to avoid constipation and enthusiastic amateurs.

In June, Jeff and I volunteered to serve a year 'outside Australia'

on some urgent operation. Norm may have already joined the AIF. Ken went on to serve in the Western Desert and Burma with the RAAF. Jeff jumped the gun and married May which led to his mother having him released from the 15th Btn Detachment.

As described in my book Nancy and I announced our engagement. In March, 1943, Sgt Kennedy's 15th Militia Btn was garrisoning Milne Bay and I was in the malaria ward in Moresby.

I had the crazy notion that he and I should continue my enemy surveillance operations behind enemy held areas upon my return from leave; wisely, he went cool on the idea.

We next met up at Nassau Bay prior to his baptism of fire from retreating Japanese.

We lay out on the beach one starry night and were nearly caught up in a bayonet charge by troops stealthily coming ashore under the impression the area was still in Japanese hands. When 9 Div returned from El Alemain and fought the Japs at Lae my involvement with native carriers and stretcher bearers is set out in the Finschhafen chapter. It was there that I had hoped to find Norm with the MG Company. To my disappointment he had been evacuated before the intense fighting died down and made it impossible.

Ken, Jeff and I met up again on the Gold Coast in 1944 where May had a Beauty Salon. Ken told us that his bomber had been attacked in Burma by five Jap fighters and his superb marksmanship saved his aircraft as featured in the official war history. He had more recently been on a fund raising tour in America to help their war effort.

Post war Nancy and I visited Jeff at Darling Point, Manly, and her parents at Lota. In 1947 we became partners in two stores at Darra which lasted for a few years before he went on a soldier settlement tobacco farm at Clair NQ. Jeff then bought Samarinda guest house at Point Lookout where we made frequent visits for weddings of some of their seven children. It was through his mother's money and May's faith in real estate that millions were amassed. Jeff's headstone near Dunwich reflects it.

Jeff and May from time to time gave me news of Norm and your mother. Evidently their friendship lasted."



Musketeers picture from Wikipedia

Owner Found

As reported in the last Newsletter (No. 15), WW1 medals given to the family of a slain Tasmanian soldier were found in the rubbish. Police have found the rightful owner and they have now been returned.

VIN'S MATES

Private Vincent Frawley, of B Company, shares some stories about his mates.

"I first joined the 26th on the Barron River, just out of Cairns and the first lad I saw was an Aborigine and thought to myself what's he doing here.

As it turned out he finished up with me in the 10th Platoon. He was a fantastic guy and everyone loved him. His name was Bruce McCallum and he was quite a comedian.

We were on Bougainville and our company was playing football (Aussie Rules), we always had five bob on ourselves to win, there were always plenty of amateur bookmakers about to have a bet with. One of our guys, Lawry Barron (from Broken Hill) always played on the wing, this particular day Lawry couldn't get a kick. McCallum was following Lawry up and down the ground rattling



*Above:
Pte. Vin Frawley about to enter
the vintage car in the assembly
area prior to the commencement
of the 2008 ANZAC Day March.*

some money in his hands yelling "Hey Barron we backed us - not them!"

When we were on patrol McCallum often sent word up to the forward scout that there was movement at 1 o'clock, 2 o'clock etc and he was always close to the mark.

We went on to Rabual and by then we were living in tents. One night McCallum started to laugh. One of the boys said "Hey McCallum what are you laughing about" and he replied "I don't have time to laugh during the day." As I said, he was a great guy."

VALE

Lou Mann, Dick Pilcher,
Jim Crossley, Snow Brady
Gaeris Smith, Joe Sullen
Eric Riordon, Ray Bennett
Ron Bishop and
Dick Wellington



*Above:
Typical wartime Aussie Rules football game. This match was in 1943.*

TORRES STRAIT LIGHT INFANTRY TRAINED WITH 26BN

The following is an extract from the AWM's magazine *artime* Issue No.12 by author Vanessa Seekee, curator of the Torres Strait Heritage Museum on Horn Island, Queensland:

The Torres Strait Light Infantry Battalion brought pride and unity to a disadvantaged group of Australians, as they prepared to defend their homes from the Japanese

Far up a remote river in Dutch New Guinea, in December 1943, an Australian patrol ran into two boatloads of Japanese soldiers. In the skirmish that followed, the Australians drew upon a long tradition as warriors. They were unusual. At a time when Australian policy was that enlisting non-Europeans was neither necessary nor desirable, these men were Torres Strait Islanders. They were members of one of the very few racially-based units in Australian military history, the Torres Strait Light Infantry Battalion.

Approval for raising an indigenous unit in the Torres Strait had been given in May 1941. An indigenous garrison unit would free up other soldiers to be sent to New Guinea. In giving approval, the Acting Prime Minister wrote:

Approval has been given in principle to the raising of one company of Torres Strait Islanders for service on Thursday Island for the duration of the war and 12 months after.

The Torres Strait Light Infantry trained as

an infantry unit, exercising in the jungle on Prince of Wales Island with the 5th Machine Gun Battalion and the **26th Battalion**, AIF. Training included standard basic recruit training, construction of slit trenches and other defensive posts, reconnaissance patrols and dispersal of stores and ammunitions. The men also carried out tactical exercises, defensive patrolling with a sniper, and stalking exercises. The army was pleased, as can be seen from an intelligence report:

"These Islanders are a fit, strong looking lot of men. They look fine and savage in uniform. They are as keen as mustard and can give us lessons in drilling and marching. I would rather fight with them than against them. They are very quiet mannered, seem quite content to work all day. If any trouble starts I should like to have a few of the "boys" handy."

AWM119169



BERT BARKER AND HIS MACHINES

By Glen Harris, family friend of the Barkers.

Herbert (Bert) Barker is a great bloke, post war he started work with a tip truck on the construction of the Upper Yarra Dam. Then called *Barker Brothers* with brothers Eddy and Ben from a workshop service station in Wesburn, had log trucks pulling logs out of the surrounding bush to local timber mills and timber trucks carting hardwood timber to Melbourne. It was a real family business, nephew Wayne Barker coming into the business as mechanic and truck driver; son Rodney truck-driving; son Trevor mechanic; wife Shirley and Eddy's wife Faye all contributing to that business. Bert has always been great with kids all his life giving kids a good time. Bert's hobbies have evolved around old cars and ex army vehicles. Bert has restored many cars, the best being two 1936 straight eight Auburns; a super charged 2-door soft top

Sportster and a soft top 4-door Phaeton. He has had Austin 7's, Austin 10's, an old Dodge 2-door, ex-army personnel cars, troop carriers and even had tanks.



Bert Barker, ANZAC DAY 2008