

# 26 Battalion Association Victorian Branch

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

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# NEWSLETTER

November 2011

ISSUE 19



*Is Vin the last original veteran from 26th Battalion to 'march' in a ANZAC Day Parade? Pte Vin Frawley is photographed riding in a Mustang convertible in Melbourne 2011.*

## Welcome to Newsletter No. 19

WELCOME to the latest issue of 26 Battalion Association, Newsletter.

This month Wayne Parker investigates the WW1 Regiment Colours and we have an article by Justin Taylan who visited the remains of Japanese Tanks in Bougainville.

I thank Peter Nowlan for contacting Justin for his story.

- Colin Block, Editor

## New address for website: [www.26bn.org](http://www.26bn.org)

Some of you may have noticed that our official website was offline for some weeks, so we decided to change our web-hosting provider, to one that is hopefully more reliable.

Following an extra-ordinary committee meeting, we agreed to use some membership donations to purchase a domain name (web address) of our own. That has now occurred and we decided upon [www.26bn.org](http://www.26bn.org). We have also changed our web-hosting provider.

Despite some of the veterans not having access to the Internet, our website has been a wonderful way of communicating with all sorts of people that have a connection with us, whether local, interstate or overseas.

On the technical side, our previous web-hosting provider claimed to be having difficulties moving their servers from The Netherlands to the USA. A technical expert explained that they were having trouble with

## Message from the President

the system that stores user names and passwords.

To move away from these issues, we have engaged another web-hosting provider and separately purchased our own domain names **26bn.org** and **www.26bn.org**.

Why did we choose "26bn"? Of course, it stands for 26th Battalion. It is easy to remember and is quick to type in.

Why ".org"? It stands for "organisation" and since we are a not-for-profit organisation, it is quite appropriate. Besides ".com" is generally for commercial enterprises although it is popular for other uses too. In any event, the ".com" address was already taken, so we could not use it anyway, however ".com.au" was available.

Why no ".au"? Firstly, it is to keep our address short and secondly, it costs significantly more.

Having our own domain will allow us to switch to other web-hosting providers pretty quickly without much downtime and without changing our web address each time. The expiry date of our domain will be in five years, at which time it can be renewed if desired.

So, just to keep it simple, our new web address is **www.26bn.org**.

Hello to all 26 Battalion Association members, I hope this edition finds you in good health.



Well, here it is November; one wonders where the year has gone.

As you are probably aware, we are no longer dining at Bells Hotel for our April reunion. I got this news only a few days before this year's ANZAC day parade. Fortunately, we were able to secure another venue known as 'The George Hotel' located in Cecil Street, South Melbourne, on the corner of Cecil and Coventry, which is not far from the Bells Hotel.

Colin of course has been inspirational in his tireless campaign to have the 26 Battalion Association, active on the World

Wide Web. As he has already mentioned in this Newsletter, the address is **www.26bn.org**. This is not to be confused with the 2/26th Battalion, anyway, it is fairly clear which is which.

I have found some great information on Wikipedia about the 26th Battalion (Australia), that is worth a read. Colin initiated the WW2 section of this article.

I would like to thank Colin for his efforts in promoting the 26th on the Internet. I personally am a bit of a klutz when it comes to running computers, so thanks Colin.

I will take this opportunity to wish you all the best for the Festive Season.

Take care and be well.

Regards,

**Jeff Collings**, President,  
26 Battalion Association

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## 2011 ANZAC Day Reunion in Melbourne



*Vin Frawley and Peter Baird chat at "The George" in Melbourne on 25 April 2011.*



*President Jeff Collings (front left), veteran Vin Frawley and Newsletter Editor, Colin Block (right front) and 26th Battalion families at the 2011 reunion at The George, South Melbourne*

## Japanese Tank remains in Bougainville

By **Justin Taylan**, Director of PacificWrecks.org

Seeing a Second World War tank disabled in combat is challenging in the 21st century, but not impossible. Fascinated by the Pacific theatre, I travelled to remote Bougainville Island to document wreckage 'in situ', including two rare Japanese tanks disabled in 1945.

Japanese forces swiftly occupied Bougainville in March 1942. The island was developed with airfields and bases to support Japanese offensives in the Solomons.

By mid-1943, the Japanese were on the defensive and needed reinforcements on Bougainville. Twenty-two Japanese tanks, heavy weapons and supplies were loaded aboard the seaplane carrier NISSHIN. On July 22, American aircraft attacked and sank the NISSHIN off southern Bougainville. But three Japanese infantry battalions aboard destroyers successfully landed on Bougainville.

Although most of their heavy weapons were lost aboard NISSHIN, four medium tanks had been unloaded at Rabaul. The surviving tanks were transported to Tarlena in northern Bougainville. Two months later, on November 1, the US Marines landed on Bougainville at Torokina. In a failed attempt to repulse the landing, Japanese aircraft and warships were defeated. Although the Japanese Army was under-strength in the immediate landing area, they fought tenaciously.

Although the Allied perimeter held, the Japanese continued to control the

rest of the island. By the close of 1944, American troops pushed on to the Philippines turning Bougainville over to the Australian Army for 'mopping up'.

By March 1945, the Australian Army was slowly advancing across the northern part of Bougainville and threatened to isolate the Japanese Brigade when they reached the opposite coast. Hidden for 15 months since the initial Marine landing, the Japanese tanks now had a chance to strike.

The Allies had complete air supremacy over Bougainville and aircraft provided reconnaissance and ground support.



*Bougainville, 24 May 1945 Private George Burnett (26 Battalion) peers through the rear entry hatch to the driving compartment of the Japanese tank. AWM 092550*

On March 3, two New Zealand F4U Corsairs were performing a routine patrol in the northern sector when they observed two Japanese tanks in the open. It was the first sighting of Japanese armour on the island. Surprised, the Corsairs made strafing runs. Under NZ pilots' observation, one of the tanks withdrew into the jungle. Each aircraft was armed with a single 1,000-pound bomb. The first one missed. The following one appeared to score a hit. Their bombing

led to another surprise: defoliated jungle exposed a third tank hidden nearby. Before departing, they strafed the tank still in the open but failed to incapacitate it.

On reconnaissance, an RAAF Boomerang found one tank in a small clearing and another two hidden in the undergrowth. The two in the jungle were bombed, and the tank in the open was strafed repeatedly. As fuel and ammunition detonated, it emitted a cloud of black smoke and flames.

The next morning, the tanks in the jungle had moved. Obviously neither was out of action. One tank was rediscovered later that day heavily camouflaged under trees.

At dusk, three New Zealand fighters returned and the target was marked with tracer fire to guide the bombing. On the morning of March 5, nine more fighters dropped bombs and reported two hits, claiming they had blown off the tank's turret and doors. For two additional days, fighter-bombers and other aircraft continued to strike the area, targeting a suspected tank depot and supply area.

In fact, the Japanese had lost only the one tank, but halted their advance over open ground. The other tanks took up a defensive position where they had stopped, but no Australian attack materialised in their area.

Two months passed before the Japanese retreated to positions further to the south.

When an Australian patrol of D Company of the 26th Infantry Battalion reached the tanks in late May, they found them abandoned. One of the tanks that Private George Burnett scrutinised, was dug in and used as a pillbox.

Continued ...

## Justin visits the Japanese tanks in the present day

Only six examples of the Type 89 tank remain in the world: four rest in museums or as monuments and the other two lie undisturbed on



*A patrol from D Company, 26 Battalion examines a captured Japanese medium tank. It was dug in and used as a pillbox by the enemy near Ruri Bay. Pte George Burnett looks from the turret. AWM 092547*

Bougainville.

Visiting the island in present-day Papua New Guinea requires very long flights, poor connections, extensive stopovers and living in fairly primitive conditions.

For Bougainville's people, the tanks are fixtures of everyday life known simply as 'the Japanese tanks'. I was guided by villagers to the first one, its 57mm gun is facing rear-wards, rusted firmly into place and matching the March 3, 1945 aerial photographs taken, during the attack.

The body is riddled by gashes from shrapnel that penetrated the hull and turret. Even the gun barrel has an impact near the tip.

Extensive damage to the hull suggests this was the vehicle destroyed by F4U Corsairs. The only

discernible difference today is that the open grassy field pictured in 1945 is now lightly forested.

The top of the turret is ajar and the cupola has collapsed inward. Photographs from the mid-1970s

show it still intact, indicating this damage was not caused during the war. The interior of this tank is in poor condition, and not accessible due to the collapsed portion.

I was surprised by the appearance of the second tank. Exposed to the elements for over 60 years, the exterior is covered with green moss, melding it into its jungle environment. Nearby tree trunks are nearly as wide in diameter as the hull. The tank looks more like an enormous tree stump than a weapon of war.

The main gun is missing and the 6.5mm machine gun removed when the tank was found by Australian troops during May 1945. Weapons are usually the first item removed from any accessible wreck. Photos of the same tank taken 30 years earlier reveal that the fenders, engine panels and exhaust stacks are now missing. It is unclear if these were scrapped or removed for some other purpose. The engine is still mostly intact, although missing many parts. Even the radiator remains, a rare feature as most were scrapped post-war for their copper value.

Circling the tank, I searched for signs of damage from the numerous air attacks, but could find no obvious shrapnel wounds in the hull or turret, aside from a broken tread.

Apparently the bombing was not as effective as attacking pilots reported.

Peering inside the interior seemed spacious, until I remembered the armaments were removed, leaving only the empty ammunition rack for 57mm shells. I entered the front hatch, but found it to be a tight squeeze for someone my size. It is hard to imagine a crew of four crammed inside this compartment. It must have been unbearable, especially in the heat and humidity of tropical Bougainville.

Exposed to the elements, the interior is full of leaves, rotting vegetation, and modern rubbish like plastic bags and soda cans.

Another surprise was that I found that the inside is lined with a white fibrous material that was deteriorating in some places and hanging loosely. This is asbestos used for heat insulation, so I decided not to make a closer inspection!

Most likely, this is the second tank that was observed to have moved into the jungle. Japanese records indicate that it was not destroyed in the aerial attacks, and was manned as a fixed defensive position until Japanese forces withdrew from the area.

I stood in the turret to recreate the photograph of Private George Burnett of the 26th Battalion Australian Army posed in the same position when his patrol discovered the tanks on May 24, 1945.

I was unable to locate any data plates or stencilled markings indicating the date of manufacture or the hull serial number. Likely, such identifying tags have long since disappeared or been removed as souvenirs.

Sadly, I could not coax either tank to reveal any additional secrets.

A third Type S9 tank remained in this same vicinity until the early 1980s. It

was purchased from the landowner, Oscar Bond, for a pig and a special ceremony to release its spirit and transported to the grounds of the Kieta Lions Club by Bob Strong aboard a Rabaul stevedores low-loader, where it was installed on two concrete pads and repainted.

Because the landowner kept the original gun barrel for himself, a fake barrel was installed in its place.

During the 1980s Bougainville Crisis, the Kieta Memorial Park fell into disrepair and was overgrown. The tank still remains, but is today encroached by jungle foliage and unpainted for many years. It has no engine or fenders and its hull still shows shrapnel damage. Probably like others, it was not heavily smashed up as the Allied reports had claimed but simply abandoned by the Japanese.

Although Japanese armour hardly has an enthusiastic following today, there is something fascinating about these relics and the bravery (or foolishness) of the men who utilised them in the face of overwhelming Allied power. The two tanks left in situ are a microcosm of the disappointments of Japanese armour.

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Designed in the late 1920s, the Type 89 was obsolete when it arrived on Bougainville in 1943. Carefully hidden for 18 months after the Allied landing, their demise was assured when spotted from the air and dogged by relentless fighter attacks.

Although only one was destroyed, the others were abandoned without ever



*Above: 24 May 1945.*

*Pte George Burnett of D Company 26 Infantry Battalion holds a 6.5mm light machine gun taken from the Japanese tank. The gun is hopper fed from the top. AWM 092551*

firing a shot.

Villagers are proud of these wrecks, and before departing I took many group photos with my new friends posing with 'their tanks'.

I reflected on the great struggle that brought these rare tanks to Bougainville and the unique circumstances that have preserved

both as monuments for over 60 years.

Bougainville remains one of the few places in the world where a traveller can explore Second World War tanks precisely where they were disabled.

Special thanks to Akira 'Taki' Tukizawa, Steve Kleiman and Daniel Leahy for additional assistance.

**Does anyone have stories or photos related to these tanks or the drive to northern Bougainville? If so, contact [info@pacificwrecks.org](mailto:info@pacificwrecks.org) Web: [PacificWrecks.org](http://PacificWrecks.org)**

## - Lest we forget -



*Pte L H Smith from 10 Platoon died of wounds on 7 January 1945 and was the first 26 Battalion soldier killed on Bougainville.*

## 11am 11.11.11

11am 11/11/11 is this year's Remembrance Day and although the numbers are unlike any before in living memory, it acknowledges in precisely the same way, the sacrifices of our service men and women with one minute silence.



## The Colours – it's not black and white

From Wayne Parker

THE King's and Regimental Colours of 26 Battalion have been lost: probably....

A Unit's Colours recognise honourable performance in battle, and are among its most valued possessions. Colours have their own guard party at ceremonies.

When 26 Battalion AIF went to war in 1915, it had no Colours. Students of *All Hallows School*, Brisbane made a



*All Hallows flag 1916*

flag in 1916, and sent it to the Unit in France. The flag survived, and is displayed in the Military Memorial Museum, Brisbane.

26 Battalion received its King's Colour in 1920. It measured 36 x 45 inches, with a 2 inch fringe, and was based on the British Union flag of 1900. No clear picture of it has been found.

Senator W.J. Cooper said in 1939 that the Regimental Colour was made by girls of St Anne's Industrial School, Brisbane in the 1920s, and purchased with Unit funds for £80 (\$5723 today). The Colours attended the opening of old Parliament House, Canberra on 9 May 1927, and were revealed to the Brisbane public on 1 April 1928.

The Regimental Colour was of "...green silk, with a circle in the centre surrounded by a wreath of

*wattle, and surmounted by a crown.*" It was also described as "...of exquisite workmanship..." and "...fringed with gilt...".

The battle honours included on 26 Battalion's Regimental Colour were Pozieres, Ypres 1917, Broodseinde, Albert 1918, Hindenburg Line, Bullecourt, Menin Road, Amiens, Mont St. Quentin and Gallipoli 1915.

Following the delinking of 15/26 Battalion, the Colours were taken by Senator Cooper to Townsville and presented to the reformed 26 Battalion on 27 August 1939.

The Colours were presented to Longreach Shire in June 1942 by the Battalion Adjutant (a local man who became a Shire Councillor in the late 1950s), and placed in the strongroom in the Shire Hall by the Shire Clerk.

What became of the Colours that belonged to the Battalion commemorated by our Association?

There is no further mention in the Unit's War Diary. The Battalion held reunions in Longreach after the War until at least 1950, and Anzac Day was celebrated each year: reports did not mention the Colours. "Never Unprepared" by A. N. Turrell says on Page 9 that the Colours were destroyed by fire in the 60s. Longreach memories are that they were destroyed in a fire in the 40s or 50s: no other evidence of the fate of the Colours has emerged from that district.

The "Longreach Leader" newspaper of Friday 31 October 1958 reported a fire that destroyed most of the Shire Hall early on 29 October 1958. The office area at the front of the Hall was undamaged. "...all the old council files stacked in a room adjoining the stage..." were destroyed. The Colours are not mentioned.

In March this year, Wayne and his wife found the "26<sup>th</sup> Battalion Regimental History", at the John Oxley Library, Brisbane. The book

covers the period 1912 to 1938. Among other things, it contains a typed copy of the Unit's Gallipoli campaign, and handwritten notes of its battles in France and Belgium in 1916-18. The book is now safely preserved, but has obviously had an adventurous life...

Inside the book was one clear photo of the Regimental Colour – possibly



*Regimental Colour of 26 Battalion*

the first time it has been seen since June 1942.

It is not yet clear just where the Colours were in October 1958. The Colours may have been destroyed in the fire that year; they may have survived, but were destroyed later (as suggested in "Never Unprepared"); they may have been relocated to someone's house for "safekeeping" sometime after 1942. We may never know.

For now, the story stops, rather than ends. Wayne will continue the search.

"26<sup>th</sup>  
BATTALION  
REGIMENTAL  
HISTORY"  
at John Oxley  
Library,  
Brisbane

