

# 26 Battalion Association Victorian Branch

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

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# NEWSLETTER

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*Above: Soldiers train on a route march laden with full pack, in 1940. Some years later Pte Keith Miles (26 Battalion) scrambled up a rope ladder wearing his full pack to embark the troop ship 'Canberra'.*

## Welcome to Newsletter No. 20

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

This month Veterans Keith Miles and Norm Turrell remember as young lads some of their WW2 experiences and the trouble they has with transport.

Please note the change in the meeting point in Melbourne on ANZAC Day as outlined in the President's Message.

- Colin Block, Editor

## Ship runs aground

As recently reported in the news, when the cruise ship sank last January off Italy's coast, Keith Miles was reminded of his own experience. He writes:

“ When *A Coy* flew back from Tanahmerah we landed on the west side of Cape York, probably Weipa. After a few days the ship *Canberra* arrived to pick us up. I think we scrambled up a rope ladder with

full pack and 303 rifle – no piece of cake.

After tea we were in hammocks on top of the deck looking where we were going and dead ahead was a huge sand bank. So right over the top of it they went, damaging the keel of the boat. So it was decided that we were to be taken off onto barges which

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## Ship runs aground

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were coming from Thursday Island.

By this time, it was well into the night. It was black as all hell. So we went down the

*Below: Similar to Keith Miles, Corporal Russell (A Co, 2/23 Bn), climbs a scrambling net from a barge in 1944. AWM080403*



## Homecoming after the War

In his interview to the *Australians At War Film Archive*, Norm Turrell describes how he got home after the War.

“An Adjutant came to me one day and he said, "Norm, do you want to go home?"

I said, "You're joking Kim."

He said, "You've got more points than anyone else in the unit, because of your circumstances. Now you can go tomorrow."

I said, "Thank you very much sir."

He said, "But there's only one c a t c h .

You've got to find your own way home."

"That is no problem."

I was very friendly with



ladder again, pack and all, onto the barges or whatever else they could muster.

So we seemed to be getting nowhere, as some said later, there were two tides up there, in opposite directions.

Finally we got to Thursday Island where we spent two weeks waiting for another boat to take us to Townsville and finally to Brisbane where the Battalion was in camp prior to going to Bougainville. We were reinforced to Battalion strength prior going to Bougainville.”

the Americans. I went straight down to the air force, "Want to get to Moresby". "Right, Buddy! You be here tomorrow morning, we'll take you too."

Away I go in a bomber to Moresby. I get to Moresby, same thing. I go to see the Yanks.

“Got myself to Brisbane, Brisbane.” I went to the Air Force, got onto a flying boat and landed at Rose Bay, Sydney Harbour, in style. And then train to Melbourne.

In the course of a week I got home under my own steam. I wanted to get home. I'd had six years of it and my brother was still listed missing and I thought "I've got to get home to Mum”

## President's Message

Hello to all 26 Battalion Association members. Another year has once again flown by and ANZAC day is upon us once more.

Before I go any further, there has been a **change in the meeting point.** We are now meeting outside the National Gallery of Victoria, corner St Kilda Rd and Southbank Boulevard. We will be marching off at 9.45 am, a bit earlier than last year. If you are lost always ask a Marshal. They usually wear red arm bands and are very helpful.



Due to the road works in Swanston St, the March has been shortened this year. So pass the message on to everyone you know who you think may turn up.

I hope you are all well and look forward to seeing you all at the ANZAC Day March and lunch afterwards.

The lunch will be at the same venue as last year, **The George Hotel** 139 Cecil St, South Melbourne, corner of Coventry and Cecil between 12.30pm and 1.00 pm.

Cheers and all the best

**Jeff Collings**

### RSVP

To reserve a seat for ANZAC Day lunch, please let us know numbers attending.

Email:-

WebMaster26Bn@gmail.com

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Norm's story and photo is courtesy of AAWFA.

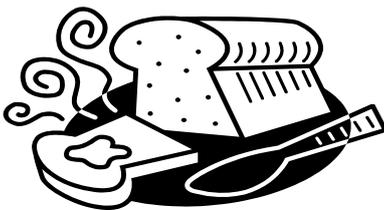
See the full interview at

[www.australiansatwarfilmarchive.gov.au/aawfa/interviews/82.aspx](http://www.australiansatwarfilmarchive.gov.au/aawfa/interviews/82.aspx)

*Left: Young Norm Turrell wearing his slouch hat.*

## - The Poetry of Youth -

I remember the cheese of my childhood,  
 And the bread that we cut with a knife.  
 When children helped out with the housework,  
 And the man went to work, not the wife.  
 The cheese never needed an ice chest,  
 The bread was so crusty and hot.  
 The children were seldom unhappy,  
 And the wife was content with her lot.  
 I remember the milk from the billy  
 With yummy rich cream on the top,  
 Our dinner came hot from the oven  
 And not from the fridge in the shop.  
 The kids were a lot more contented;  
 They didn't need money for kicks,  
 But for a game with their mates in the paddock,  
 And sometimes the "Saturday Flicks".  
 I remember the shop on the corner  
 Where a penn'worth of lollies was sold.  
 Do you think I am a bit too nostalgic,  
 Or is it I'm just getting old?



Written by  
 A. Maxwell Murray  
 Resident – St Paul's Court  
 (by the sea)

Submitted by a 26 Battalion veteran

## WW2 - Brief History 26 Battalion

After the WW1 the responsibility of the defence of Australia was given to the Militia which was organised along the same lines as the 1st AIF, with units keeping the same numerical designations. Consequently the 26th Battalion became a Militia battalion, known as the **26th Battalion (Logan and Albert Regiment)**. In 1934 the 26th was merged with the 15th to become the 15/26th Battalion, although it was subsequently de-linked in 1939 when the *new 26th Australian Infantry Battalion* was raised in Queensland. After that the Battalion was attached to the 11th Brigade and used in various garrison roles in the early part of World War II.

In 1943 a detachment from the Battalion was sent to the Dutch East Indies as part of Merauke Force. Later in the war the entire 26th Battalion, along with the rest of the 11th Brigade were sent to Bougainville where they saw action against the Japanese. After the war, the 26th Battalion was used to guard Japanese prisoners on Rabaul, remaining there until March 1946, before being returned to Australia and subsequently being disbanded on 26 August 1946.

With the outbreak of World War II in September 1939, the 26th Battalion undertook a series of training camps around northern Queensland as it began to re-establish its numbers. In this time it was placed under the command of the 11th Brigade, along with the 31st and 51st Battalions, both of which were Queensland militia battalions. Many of the initial recruits came from Italian-Australian families from north Queensland, however, as the battalion grew, reinforcements from other Australian states arrived during 1942 and early 1943.

The 26th Battalion first saw active service when 'A' Company became part of the Merauke Force in May 1943, becoming the first Militia unit to serve outside of Australian territory. Later the battalion was converted to being an AIF unit, and during December 1944 the battalion relieved the

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## WW2 Brief History 26 Battalion

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American forces in Torokina, Bougainville Island, New Guinea. Over the next eight months the 26th Battalion took part in the campaign to tie down the much larger Japanese forces on the island, carrying out numerous patrols to keep the Japanese off balance throughout the early stages of the campaign, before taking part in a number of amphibious operations to clear the area surrounding the Soraken Plantation. When hostilities ceased the 26th Battalion was sent to Rabaul for garrison duty in September 1945, where it remained until March 1946 when it was returned to Australia. The battalion was finally disbanded on 28 August 1946.

During the course of the Battalion's involvement in the war, it lost 40 men killed in action or died on active service and 110 wounded.

Extract from: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/26th\\_Battalion\\_\(Australia\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/26th_Battalion_(Australia))

### Who is John Peebles' mate?



The soldier on the left is Pte John Peebles QX 29452 who served in the 26th Battalion in HQ Coy. The soldier on the right also served in the 26th Bn. Does anyone know his identity? If so, please contact us.

#### VALE

Roy White

Joe Wilkinson

John Peebles

## - Lest we forget -

Colin Block recently visited the Australian War Memorial in Canberra. Colin tells us about his visit.

“One thing that amazed me while I was visiting the AWM was how easily accessible it was. It has two free car parks, one of them underground with lifts into the main foyer. We chose the outdoor car park and walked down the memorial path. Scores of battalion plaques were imbedded into the concrete.

Strolling down the path towards the main entrance, it became quite obvious that there was no 26th Battalion plaque. I thought ‘That is one thing our Association should arrange’, so I will make inquiries about the costs involved in getting a plaque made.

Entry to the Memorial is free but a gold coin donation is appreciated.

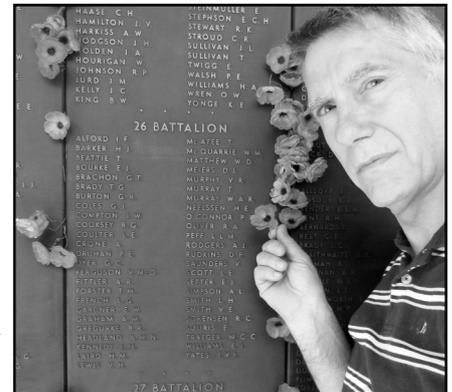
Volunteers take small groups on free 90-minute guided tours of the Memorial. To personalise the effort

during the wars, the guides tell how individuals overcame challenges and pointed out any significant or fascinating relics they may have used. Our guide focussed more on memorabilia and displays from WWI.

Constructed in the 1920's and still pristine, the WWI dioramas were outstanding and I was astounded by the artists' skills.

I was impressed with was one display that resembles an interior of a WWII bomber where the floor vibrates, simulating the plane's propellers during the “flight”.

One thing that struck me was the age of the soldiers – often only boys. Apparently the Army like to train young soldiers because they considered themselves invincible.”



Colin Block places a poppy of remembrance next to the Roll of Honour of 26 Battalion at the Australian War Memorial, Canberra.