

26 Battalion Association Victorian Branch

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

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NEWSLETTER

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Left: Norm Turrell (2007)

Above: Norm Turrell (centre) with his mates John Collins, Ken MacKellin, Vin Frawley, Bob Gaudion, Norm Donaldson and Len Dawson on ANZAC Day 2007 in Melbourne

Welcome to Newsletter No. 22

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

My thanks to Jeff Collings, Phill Evenden, Peter Nowlan, Kingsley Locke, Tom Sheridan and Kathy Anstiss for your contributions to this Newsletter. They are most welcome.
Colin Block, Editor

ANZAC Day Reunion 2013 in Melbourne

THIS year there has been a change of location of the starting point in Melbourne's ANZAC Day March.

We are now meeting on the West side of Swanston Street near *Young and Jackson's* Hotel between Flinders St and Flinders Lane. The meeting time is between 9.30am and 10.00am and we will be marching off at 10.30am.



Jeff Collings, Vin Frawley and Colin Block on ANZAC Day 2011

President's Message



To all our 26 Battalion Association members,

It is with profound sadness that I write to convey the passing of

Mr Norm Turrell.

I feel that I must tell you about the first time Norm and I met. For a couple of years I was marching with a 26th Battalion banner made by my brother and me, after being told by the RSL that we could not march.

On the third year I noticed a man holding a laminated piece of paper with "26th Inf Bat" written on it. I approached the man who turned out to be Bob Gaudion, and I asked him about the sign he was holding. Upon further discussions, Bob yells out to a very staunch looking gentleman, "Norm, I have found him!"

Instantly I knew that this fellow Norm was in a position of authority just by his presence and I thought that my march had come to abrupt end. With a commanding voice, Norm extends his hand and said

"Hi, my name is Norm Turrell, President of the 26 Australian Infantry Battalion Reunion Association, Victoria"

Norm proceeded to question us about our father who served and that he was very pleased to finally meet us and has been looking for us for three years.

Norm then invited us to march with the 26th and to have a meal with them at Bells Hotel after the march. I was very pleased that day and to be accepted, no questions asked after being so elusive.

Norm from then on was a great confidant, life coach and a wealth of knowledge regarding all things ANZAC especially of course the 26th Infantry Battalion. Norm told me at his house when I used to drop in for a coffee about a book that he was writing and having published. I can say I am a proud owner (signed copy) of one of Norm's books "Never Unprepared, a history of the 26th Infantry Battalion".

Norm passed the security of the banner onto me which I accepted with great honour, and I could see Norm had a tear welling up in his eye and I could see he was letting go of something very dear to his heart.

To Norm's Family, please accept my deepest sympathies and he will surely be missed.

Jeff Collings

Invitation

MELBOURNE

Thursday 25 April 2013

Once again former 26th Battalion members and descendants are invited to march on ANZAC Day in Melbourne to join former comrades from our unit. We especially welcome descendants and those who would like to represent a loved one who is no longer with us.

We will be meeting between 9.30am and 10.00am at Swanston Street West between Flinders St and Flinders Lane.

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 we have secured adequate transport for this year's march for those who are unable to make the full distance.

After the parade, we will return to The George Hotel, 139 Cecil Street, South Melbourne (near corner of Coventry) at 12.30pm.

ACKNOWLEDMENT OF FORMER MEMBERS

In acknowledging former members in Newsletter No. 21, November 2012 the following names were omitted:

Corporal Robert Buxton

Norman Downey

Fred Carrington



Scan to link to 26bn.org. Don't know what this is? Ask a young person!

Flanders Poppy

BY COLIN BLOCK

LAST year thought I would test the theory of sewing poppy seeds on Anzac Day and picking their flowers on Remembrance Day. So on Anzac Day in Melbourne I planted poppies and true to form they were ready on 11 November as shown in this picture of my garden.



According to Yates Australia, "Flanders poppy grows easily from seed and this time of year, when we're commemorating

Anzac Day, is the ideal time to sow. Poppies don't transplant happily so it's best to sow them straight into the garden bed where they're to grow.

"Because it grew in such profusion on the Belgian and French battlegrounds, the red corn poppy, *Papaver rhoeas* (pictured), became forever associated with the First World War. It's said that the churning of the soil caused by horses' hooves and soldiers'

boots encouraged never-before-seen displays of these wildflowers.

"After the 'war to end all wars' ended, artificial poppies were made and sold by war veterans to raise money for disabled ex-soldiers. It became a tradition to proudly wear the poppy on Remembrance Day, 11 November. Ever since then the red Flanders Poppy, like rosemary and the Gallipoli Lone Pine, has been grown as a thoughtful memento of those soldiers who died in that Great War almost a century ago."

Wikipedia also describes the origins of its significance.

"Poppies are a prominent feature of *In Flanders Fields* (pictured) by Canadian Lieutenant Colonel John McCrae, one of the most frequently quoted English-language poems composed during the First World War."

First World War Military Cross

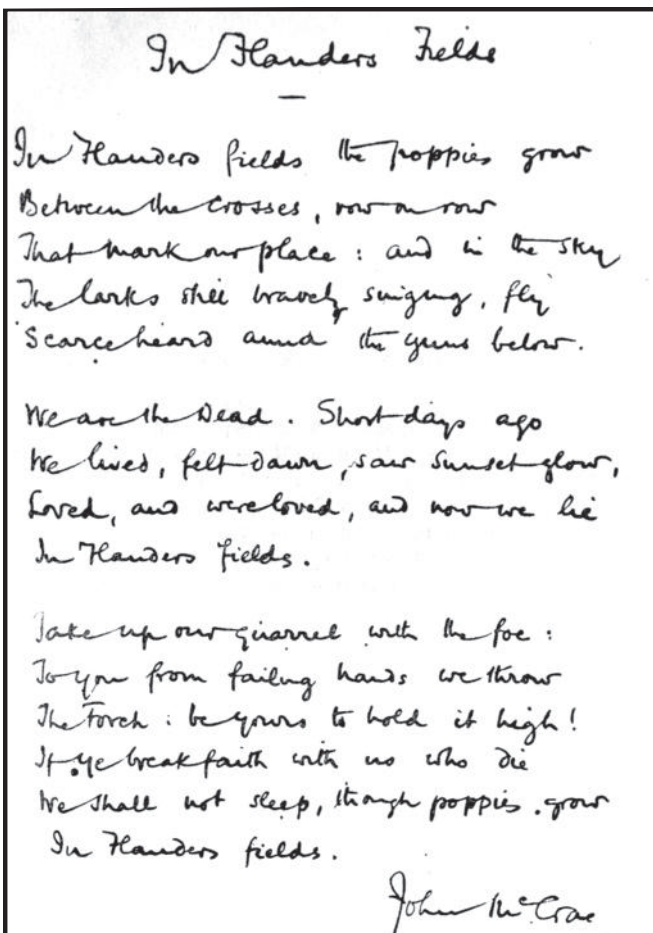
Kathy Anstiss emailed about Gilbert Harry her first cousin, twice removed, who has recently been honoured in Gympie at a ceremony.

Gilbert Harry (1893-1931), enlisted in the Australian Imperial Force on 13 May 1915 gave his occupation as gunsmith and settler. Harry was allotted to the 26th Battalion which landed at Gallipoli on 11 September. There, during the 26th's fifty hours in the trenches, he won his first decoration, the Military Medal. Harry was awarded the first of his Military Crosses in September for '*courage, devotion to duty and plucky and clever reconnaissance*' as brigade intelligence officer before the attack on Westhoek Ridge, near Ypres, Belgium. On 4 October he was wounded during the fighting around Broodseinde. He was awarded a Bar to his Military Cross for '*fine courage and determination*' south of Framerville, France, on 11 August 1918. He died, unmarried, at Gympie, Australia, on 21 March 1931



Belated grave marker erected at Gympie.

Anne Delisle, Gilbert Harry's niece helps unveil it.



Picture of John McCrae's poem from Wikipedia

Dress and equipment, 1944

This is an extract from the book by Bob Doneley titled *Toowoomba to Torikina. The 25th Battalion in peace and war, 1918-45*.

“By mid-1944 practical experience in jungle Warfare was shaping the dress and equipment of the Australian soldier. Three key factors influenced this development:

- the need to move quickly to engage the Japanese in battle meant that soldiers’ equipment should be as light as possible;
- the need to be self-sufficient for days or weeks at a time if cut off from supplies; and
- the need to prevent malaria.

These factors shaped what clothing would be worn and what equipment would be carried.



Item	Weight (kg)
Uniform	
Trousers, long	0.68
Shirt	0.45
Socks	0.11
Boots, studded	1.81
Gaiters, American	0.4
Hat, KP (slouch hat)	0.2
Field dressing	0.06
Pay-book in waterproof wallet	0.03
Identity discs worn around the neck	
	3.74
Equipment	
Haversack	0.57
Web belt and pouches	0.9
Water bottle with carrier	1.25
Helmet with net, strapped on haversack	1.16
	3.88

Soldier leaves 26th Battalion for RAAF

Tom Sheridan remembers that he and his brother John from Julia Creek and both served in the 26th Battalion in the early days from its inception until they both joined the R.A.A.F.

He says, “I was on guard duty on Sunday night 3rd September 1939 at Kissing Point when war was declared and remember the boys coming back to camp "fuller" than usual.

“We also both served at Meiwera. I became an Air Gunner instead of a pilot because the following

telegram was sent to the recruiting officer:

CONCERNING PRIVATE T.J. SHERIDAN DUE REPORT 15TH [February 1940] CAN STRONGLY RECOMMEND HIM GOOD CHARACTER, VERY KEEN AND COMPETENT WITH VICKERS MACHINE GUN. TEN WEEKS TRAINING MY PLATOON. FURTHER REFERENCE COLONEL MURRAY... LIEUT. WALL, 26TH BATTALION.

“I had to wait in the H.Q. tent at Meiwera for Colonel Murray V.C. to sign my discharge and when he did he shook my hand and said, ‘*Good Luck, Laddie*’.

Continued page 5 ...

In the Haversack	Weight (kg)
Iron emergency ration	0.322
Mosquito lotion	0.3
Mite lotion	0.3
Atebrin in tin (seven clays supply)	0.085
Water stabilising tablets	0.17
Whipcord (for booby traps)	0.17
Spare pair of boot laces	0.17
Spare pair of socks	0.113
Housewife	0.17
Mess tins	1.02
Knife, fork, spoon	0.127
Tea and sugar in small containers	0.17
Billy, in lieu of mug	0.06
Towel	0.283
Soap	0.043
Shaving kit and comb	0.456
	<hr/>
	3.96
Rations in haversack and in pouches	
Three days hard rations, plus three tins of meat and six packets of biscuits	2.2
One additional iron emergency ration	0.34
	<hr/>
	2.54

Roll on belt	Weight (kg)
Half-man tent	1.2
Groundsheet	1.36
Mosquito net	0.91
Pullover	0.425
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	3.9
Machete or small shovel	0.82
Total equipment carried on the man	18.84
Weapons	
- Rifle, .303", 100 rounds of ammunition and two grenades	9
- Owen submachine gun, 6 x 25 round magazines, another 250 rounds in pack, and two grenades	11.15
- Bren gunner, 4 x 25 round magazines, and two grenades (NB extra ammunition was carried by the Nos 2 and 3)	16
Large pack, to be left in base and brought forward as required	
Pack	0.625
Gas cape	1.13
Shins x 2	0.9
Trousers x 2	2.72
Underclothing	0.227
Towel	0.283
Socks	0.113
Boots	1.8
Personal items	1.8
	<hr/>
	7.8
Respirator	2.04
Blanket	1.36

Therefore, total weights carried under different conditions were as follows:

Marching Order : Clothing, webbing equipment, large pack, blanket, rifle, ammunition, five days rations - **35 kg**

Battle Order: As above, less pack and blanket - **28 kg**

Assaulting from a static position: All immediately non-essential items are left behind - **18.6 kg**

Soldier leaves 26th Battalion for RAAF (cont.)

"Then I had to bolt up to the rail line and wave down the Brisbane Mail to climb aboard and ride on the footplate to Proserpine.

"The interviewing R.A.A.F. officer pushed the telegram across the table and said, 'You will make a good air gunner; we can't spend money retraining you'."

Tom survived 64 missions over Europe and saw his final weeks of the war at Tocumwall NSW



Brisbane Mail Train, Rockhampton 1934.

Photo: Museum Victoria

Tribute to Norm Turrell



Albert Norman Turrell was born in London in 1919. His father was in the military during WWI and since there was not much future post War, they migrated to Australia when Norm was “just a little tacker”. When his father died at the early age of 48, Norm found himself head of the family as a fifteen year old and transformed from a boy to a man picking up odd jobs to keep the family going.

Norm gained commercial experience when he obtained a job a Rosella Preserving Company remaining there for 15 years. Ironically, the Australian icon Rosella brand perished at the same time as Norm’s passing.

In 1941 he joined the Brighton Rifles 46th Battalion where they drilled in the streets of Brighton. The Army decided that these militia battalions should reinforce the Australian Imperial Force (AIF) and in 1943 Norm was sent to the 26th Battalion in Queensland. The 26th boosted their numbers by drawing soldiers from all states of Australia. Norm was one of the first Victorians to join the Queensland unit.

He gained his commission at the Royal Military College, Duntroon in 1942 and served as a platoon commander of the 26th Battalion with the rank of Lieutenant until the end of the war. During this time wrote to his girlfriend Freda.

He was discharged in February 1946 and posted to Reserve of Officers. He relinquished his commission in August 1965.

Norm married Freda just after the War and had two sons Roger and Peter. They had been married for fifty-eight years when Freda passed away.

Norm Turrell authored the book *Never Unprepared, A history of 26 Australian Infantry Battalion AIF 1939-46* that required considerable dedicated work and research. Norm had an impeccable attention to detail, dedication, determination and persistence in making the Battalion book happen.

In northern Queensland there was a strong 26th Battalion reunion association headed up by the then President, Keith Miles and Vice President, Joe Sellen and in 1992 at a reunion meeting in Rockhampton, Norm launched the Battalion history book *Never Unprepared*

It was through this book that Norm brought together many veterans and their families from all around Australia.

He generated interest in 26 Battalion Association and he shared stories of the past and present activities of his mates from the battle field.

Although he was humble about his achievements, Norm edited the earlier issues of this Newsletter.

A number of 26th Battalion memorial plaques installations were made possible, as were commemorations in various states of Australia with the help of donations from members and book sales of *Never Unprepared*.

Even though he was not computer literate, Norm inspired the creation of the www.26bn.org website and the *26th Battalion Wikipedia* page allowing relatives and interested people from Australia and overseas to interact with the Association. Consequently, he has indirectly encouraged the younger generation to communicate their interest in the Battalion's activities via electronic means.

Norm was enthusiastic and had a positive approach with his gentlemanly ways.

His dedication to the 26th Battalion and his recollection of past events was invaluable.

Norm willingly shared his knowledge with the families of veterans up until the end, when his body weakened by its 93 years of age finally found its rest on 2 December 2012.

Our condolences to his family and to those who knew Norm personally.

VALE

Kenneth MacKellin

11.2.2013

Aged 85