

26 Battalion Association

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

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NEWSLETTER

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ISSUE 26



Above: Veteran Gordon Hardy wheeled along by grandson Grant whilst Jeff Collings leads on Anzac Day, Melbourne, 2009.

Welcome to Newsletter No. 26

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

I have received a couple of telephone calls from original 26th Battalion veterans, Keith Miles and David Watt, both in their nineties, thanking me for the Newsletter. I appreciated their calls because it makes it all worthwhile, but if it was not for

the contributions of others sharing their stories, these Newsletters would certainly be less interesting.

Keith Miles stated that Peter Millynn's uncle was in his Company during WWII. You may remember Peter's *Pilgrimage to Soraken Peninsula* in NL23, (Nov. '13) As a result of the Peter's article, Keith phoned him and they had a really good chat.

Another reader from Griffith, NSW referring to Laurie Hill in his story (NL25) said, "As peace was declared, there's this poor bloke who has to continue to serve another twelve months or so before he is discharged."

As always, your contribution to this Newsletter would be gratefully accepted.

Colin Block, Editor

LETTERS

City Projects Office,
7 August 2014
To 26 Battalion Association

Dear Sir/Madam

Anzac Square restoration

Temporary closure of the Shrine of Memories - August 2014 to 2016

Brisbane City Council is pleased to announce restoration works on Anzac Square will start in August 2014.

A joint initiative with the Queensland Government, the project will see works undertaken to protect Anzac Square, the state's memorial to those who have served their country in conflict and in peace.

Now 84 years old, the memorial is in need of significant attention, which is not uncommon in buildings of its era. Water infiltration into the concrete and stone has damaged the rooms and galleries below, threatening the future of this unique and much loved state memorial.

This important project will be undertaken in stages:

□ Stage 1 investigative works are now complete.

□ Stage 2 will undertake structural restoration from August 2014 to March 2015.

□ Stage 3 will refurbish and enhance heritage spaces, including the Shrine of Memories from mid 2015 to 2016.

Stage 2 restoration works aim to stop water infiltration into the sub-structure and walls. The project will also address issues with the reliability of the Eternal Flame and repair the memorial's stonework. During this stage, the Cenotaph will not be accessible to the public and the Eternal Flame will be temporarily

relocated to the Anzac Square Parkland. Restoration works will be completed in time for the centenary of the landing at Anzac Cove on 25 April 2015.

Stage 3 will enhance the Shrine of Memories and the other heritage spaces beneath the Cenotaph and will start after Anzac Day in 2015.

The Shrine of Memories will be closed from August 2014 until 2016 when all works are due for completion. During this time, plaques and other significant memorabilia within, will be protected and where required, restored by specialist craftsmen. Council is committed to respecting and honouring the significance of these plaques.

Once complete the restoration and



Brisbane Lord Mayor, Graham Quirk said in February that the \$13.4m project to restore Brisbane's Anzac Square (above) is 90% complete.

enhancements will ensure Anzac Square continues to serve as a reminder of the service and sacrifice of all service men and women for many years to come.

If you have any questions, please contact our free call information line on 1800 884 681 or email cityprojects@brisbane.qld.gov.au. For information outside of business hours please call Council's 24 hour contact centre on (07) 3403 8888.

Yours sincerely
Jim Mavronicholas
Project Director

MELB ANZAC DAY MARCH & REUNION

Once again former 26th Battalion members and descendants are invited to march on ANZAC Day in Melbourne to join families of 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 9.00 am and 9.30 am in Swanston St near Flinders St (near Young and Jacksons).

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 (corner of Coventry Street) at 12.30pm.

President's Message

Hello to all 26th Battalion Association members and friends.



Jeff Collings

The 100th anniversary of the Anzac Landing will be here soon and I suspect it will be a colossal event with thousands heading into the Shrine of Remembrance in Melbourne for the dawn service and march.

The idea of having an ANZAC campout, Camp Gallipoli, at the Melbourne Show Grounds is, I think a way to encourage the youth to pay tribute to our fallen diggers and to keep the ANZAC Day tradition strong. I think also it may be a good way to limit the overflow at the shrine, which I am sure will be packed this year. To even get a park remotely close to the Shrine may need some forethought of arriving even earlier than you normally would. I may take the bike in, depending on the weather of course.

The meeting area for the march, will be at 0900-0930, near the corner of Flinders and Swanston streets. I suspect that we will be finally assembling opposite the McDonalds restaurant in Swanston. We head off at 0955.

Colin has once again been the driver of the 26th with his steadfast determination on communicating news to all members. Well done Colin. I was privileged to have Colin show me his 26th Bn database where he reads through pages of documentation to find content for the newsletter, not an easy task at all.

I hope you are all well and are able to attend the dawn service and march with the 26th Bn. Lunch is at 'The George Hotel' corner of Coventry and Cecil South Melbourne. All families welcome.

Kindest regards
Jeff Collings.

How Jeep was named

I was researching the article by John Gibson on page 6 and I came across a line he wrote in his memoir:- "I allowed them to use one of the Jeeps (GP for General Purpose, hence Jeep)."

I was not aware of this slurring of "GP" and upon further internet research I found that 'G' could also mean "Government" and 'P' was a reference to 80 inch wheel base. In 1941 Popeye was a popular cartoon character who named his jungle pet "Eugene the Jeep" who was a wondrous character.

The GP ¼-ton was often called a "peep" or "geep" and later "jeep". Maybe it was the combination of Popeye's influence and "GP" that gave

Jeep its name. Apparently there are over fifty other variations on this theme.

Colin Block, Editor



43rd Field Ordnance storage of Jeeps in New Guinea, 1944. AWM 076269

An email from the Grandson

I was searching around in some old stuff and came across a picture of my grandad at his first and last Anzac Day March in 2009. I had the honour of pushing him in his wheelchair. Something I will cherish for the rest of my life.

I would like you to have it for your records. It also captures all of the other walkers that year, something I'm sure you can use in a future newsletter. I do still get these newsletters and I appreciate this.

I plan on walking next Anzac day in his memory and look forward to seeing you and others there.

Regards
Grant Hardy.

Thanks Grant, for your great photo. As you can see it has been used on the front page. Editor.

POW Artwork

Email from Keith Bettany:

Firstly, thank you so much for such an informative, clear website at 26bn.org.

My dad, Des Bettany, fought in North Malaya and spent time in several camps but 2½ years in Changi Jail.

He always told me he had to paint to keep sane and upon his death we found over 300 paintings he did during those dark days. Many of them are cartoons and show the opposite of what he was living in.

Since the website has been up we have been thrilled that over fifty additional paintings that he gave to his mates have been scanned and emailed back to us to put on the web. Who knows just how many more are out there in peoples cupboards?

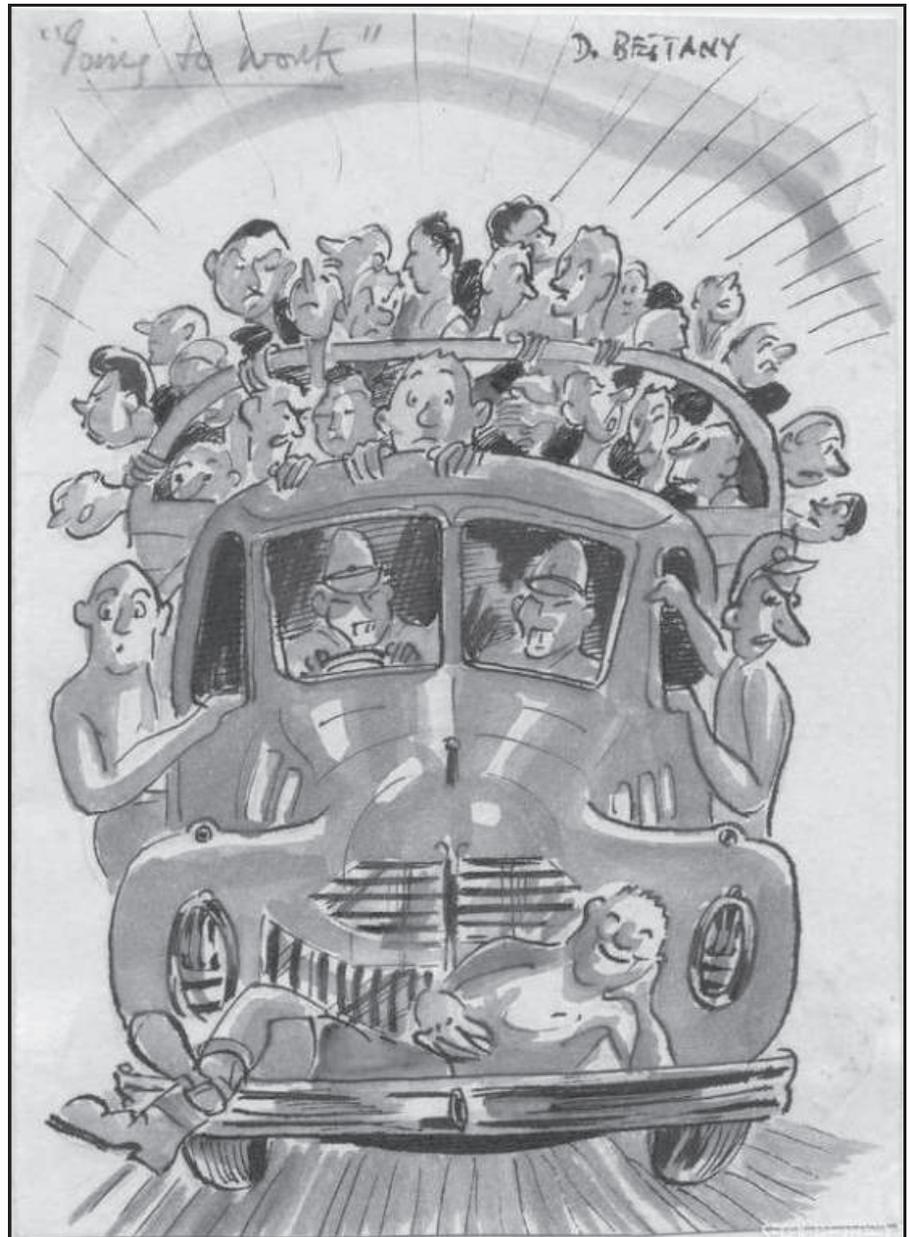
Dad told us he could pick the guys who would die the next day, they just gave up hope and lost the glimmer in their eyes. I think that is why dad gave so many of his works to his mates, to ensure they had some hope and perhaps a smile on the inside, so they could live through the terror.

If you consider the site and the paintings to be worthy, could you please share with your contacts and if appropriate link it to your site. As a family we have paid to get the site developed and are trying to spread the word.

Thank you so much for your time,
Best Regards,
Keith Bettany

www.changipowart.com

Thanks Keith for your email. Although our focus is on the 26th Battalion, I was captivated with your father's artwork, so out of respect for him and his comrades, who endured many dreadful times, I am honoured to share his colourful artwork that's on your website with our readers.
Editor.



"Going to Work" by Des Bettany. The happy faces belie reality.

In a follow up email Keith wrote,

"My dad, Des Bettany after seeing action in Europe in WW2 was evacuated from Dunkirk and posted to North Malaya. He was eventually imprisoned by the Japanese at various prisons camps on the Changi Peninsula with some 100,000 other prisoners of war (POW's) . You may well ask, how did he make it through all of this? Well, he painted to keep his sanity.

From out of the misery, starvation, exploitation and brutality that resulted in so much loss of life and serious injury (physical and mental) a series of artworks that helped Des and his mates survive the ordeal has now come to light in a family collection. This artwork of his service life before and after the Capitulation of Singapore is a range of fascinating illustrations, done often with humour.

However, while painting to keep his head, he nearly lost it, as he was also painting political cartoons of the Japanese and hiding these. They were found and after some quick talking and who knows what else occurred, Des was warned by Col Saito, if he ever painted like this again, he would get a short haircut (be beheaded). We are sure he was punished but he, like so many other ex POW's chose not to share the horrors they went through with others. I guess in telling of the horrors, they just relive them again."

Bomana War Cemetery

September 2005

By Laurie Hill



L-R John Blenkin ex-RAN, Matt (ex Coastwatcher) and Laurie Hill, 2005

FOR Australia this cemetery at Bomana is a very special place.

Surrounding us here this morning are the headstones which honour the names of those who, in 1942, faced one of the greatest tests Australian servicemen have ever known. If they had failed here, if the enemy had broken through, then Australia itself was in danger. Towns could be bombed, coastal areas attacked and the nation itself invaded. On the battles fought in Papua in 1942 so much depended and they did not let us down.

The dates on these headstones recall those terrible and hard fought actions. A date late in August early September 1942 reminds us of the heartbreaking events along the Kokoda Track, at Milne Bay and at Buna, Gona and Sanananda. Where we see the RAAF crest it recalls the gallant fight put up by those young airmen to defend Port Moresby from almost daily Japanese raids. Indeed, behind

most graves here is a story of hardship, endurance and sacrifice. Here too are the men of the Australian Navy and the Merchant Navy, and on the Port Moresby *Memorial to the Missing* we can find the names of local men who died fighting beside us in units like the Papuan Infantry Battalion.

We should not forget the nurses who returned late in 1942 to Port Moresby to tend to the wounded. One of them, Hilda Lumsden recalled holding the dying in her arms – ‘When they died’ she said ‘I felt their souls just left’.

Today the Mission Party has also come to Bomana for a very special reason. Buried here are our mates who perished on Bougainville b e t w e e n

November 1944 and August 1945. More than 500 Australian soldiers were killed in action, died of wounds or illness on that island as we fought it out with the Japanese 17th Army. They died at places like Soraken Peninsula, Slaters Knoll or along the Numa Numa Trail, places most Australians have never heard of.

Our war in the jungles, in the mountains and in the swamps

of Bougainville was terrible. While the Japanese empire might have been crumbling, a scout leading a patrol along the semi darkness of a jungle track was every bit as likely to die or be badly wounded by an enemy bullet right up to 15 August 1945. We fought a ruthless and determined enemy for whom surrender was unthinkable.

These are some units that three of us in this Mission Party here today will never forget – the 26th and 61st Battalions and the 2/4th Armoured Regiment. Those men were our mates,



Bomana War Cemetery, Port Moresby
Photo: Trip Advisor

patrolled with us, supported us, fought with us and backed us up in situations of the utmost danger. We will find their headstones. Beside them we will think of Bougainville and tell them that Australia will not forget them and what they sacrificed for victory in 1945.

Code name SUNRAY

Extracted from the Memoir of Captain John Gibson (AWM PR01846). John also wrote an article in NL18 April 2011.

MAJOR Callinan came to take over the leadership [of the 26th Battalion] and was promoted to Lieutenant Colonel. As a Major in the 2/2nd Independent Company he had been 2IC to Colonel Spence on Timor and later led the Company which kept thousands of Japs busy on Timor and created a legend of such warfare.



Major Bernard Callinan who later became Colonel Sir Bernard James Callinan AC, CBE, DS, MC

So we had a great leader who "thought like a Japanese". He was so used to fighting them as a commando leader and our type of fighting was the same. Laying ambushes and sometimes being ambushed. Jungle tracks became the "vital ground", not necessarily the high ground.

"Bernie" or "Push on" Callinan had the code name *Sunray* and each company commander was *Sunray One* for 'A' Company, *Sunray Two* for 'B'. So I was *Sunray Three* to the troops. Names were discouraged because of induction on the phone system. We would phone *Sunray* each night to explain the day's work and ask his advice on the Japs' next move and he would end up saying, "Well done, PUSH ON!"

So 'C' Company got a write up [in the Aussie newspapers] about how [one of the] Lieutenants was leading a platoon around a Jap position to cut them off inferring he was really winning the war. This gave him great prestige back home.

What the Lieutenant was actually doing was getting lost! After the Lieutenant had been out all day, in what should have taken a couple of hours, he phoned me in panic. He had been bashing through the scrub and finally came on a Jap LOC (a track or "Line of Communication") and didn't know what to do and he seemed scared stiff. So I took Coy HQ and myself and we followed the Lieutenant's signal wire. Our job was to push back the Japs occupying the flat area near the ocean where they had gardens (growing sweet potatoes).

I had one of the sound powered phones, so I was able to poke a safety pin through the platoon signal wire whenever we stopped and see how the Lieutenant was

going. We nearly reached him just as a Jap group was firing on his position with an LMG. I asked him by phone if he could get his blokes to fire high as we were close and might be able to get behind the Japs. He said he could NOT guarantee this, as some were out of range of voice.

Anyway the Japs moved off and we joined the platoon. I got him to send patrols to find out what was up and down the track. There was no Jap signal wire (usually yellow), so it was not a main track. We found that he [the Lieutenant] had dug in about 60 yards from a track junction which was occupied by the Japs in trenches. We talked to *Sunray* and he said he would not risk casualties by a direct attack but to cover the two tracks leading North by which the Japs would probably move out. They were fighting a delaying retreat from the area.

Our plan was that I would hold this position with just the four of us and the Lieutenant was to cut across a couple of hundred yards to dig in a platoon position on the other northern track and set an ambush or camp for the night as it was getting on in the day.

Well, in the jungle he got lost but sometime later came an excited phone call on his phone (we always laid line for communication). He said "John, we must be near the track - we can hear voices - it must be occupied". I said, "Stop fooling around (or similar words)! Line up your three Bren guns with all Owen sub machine gunners in a straight line so you don't shoot one another and go in with all guns blazing! - drive them off, or finish them off and dig in."

Then I called out to Alec who was a few yards up the trail as a sentry to our position and said, "Alec, don't worry if you hear a blast of shooting a couple of hundred yards away - it will be the Lieutenant attacking some Japs".

This call saved our lives! The Lieutenant in his panic, in an area of one football field, had gone around in a circle and had his platoon lined up on us! [We] were nearly casualties because I didn't realise what a fool we had as a Lieutenant platoon commander. The Lieutenant had heard my call to Alec and didn't fire.

He got sick later with nerves and couldn't eat. He did try but couldn't continue, so I asked *Sunray* to send him to school - preferably "Map Reading"!