

26 Battalion Association  
Victorian Branch

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

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# NEWSLETTER

APRIL 2006

ISSUE 8



*ANZAC DAY 2003, Melbourne.*

*Front Row: Bob Gaudion, Ken MacKellin, Vin Frawley, Jack Vicary, John Collins, Norm Turrell, Norm Donaldson.*

*Rear Row: Ray Block, Bob Froome*

**W**ELCOME to **Newsletter No. 8** and again we are pleased that **Colin Block** is arranging the design and production whilst **Norm Turrell** edits and prints this newsletter. Your contributions are always welcome.

## **ANZAC MARCH CHANGES**

**Gavin Block** our unit representative at Anzac House reports that this years March will be a little

different with new forming up points.

There is also a request to preserve the dignity of the day in memory of the Fallen. More attention should be given to dress and descendent's marching for a deceased family member be restricted to one member.

In the past it has been noted that 26 Bn members have always observed the rules in keeping with the unit motto "Never Unprepared". Following

this newsletter, potential marchers will receive an invitation to march with full details of where 26 Bn will start from, which will be an improvement from last year.

Our luncheon at Bells hotel is confirmed and we wish all those attending a pleasant day among old comrades. Due to ill health we have several members who will be unable to march but our thoughts will be with them.

## A MESSAGE FROM THE JNR VICE PRESIDENT

By BOB GAUDION

**A**S we approach another Anzac Day it is worthwhile reflecting on the history of Victorian Branch of 26 Battalion Reunion Association.

Our section of the Association began when two ex-members of 26 Battalion met in Melbourne for the 1990 Anzac Day march. Subsequently, some members went to reunions at Rockhampton, Queensland and also met on Anzac Day in Melbourne. As the numbers attending increased various efforts resulted in having a Buthan cypress tree and Battalion plaque, in Shrine of Remembrance forecourt, being dedicated to the memory of those members of the Battalion who made the supreme sacrifice in battle and eventually of being presented with a Battalion banner to march behind on Anzac Days.

In latter years relatives of ex Battalion members have been encouraged to join in the Anzac Day march and subsequent luncheon.

To keep in touch with members and achieve a successful get together at the march and luncheon, until now most of the organizing, letter writing etc. has been left a few members of the Association. However, those members now wish to hand over these duties to some of the younger relatives of members and we are very pleased to advise that, in the future, Colin Block and his son, Gavin, will be the ones who will be performing some of these duties. I am very confident that both Colin and Gavin will perform these duties to the very best of their abilities and that the Victorian Branch of the Association will continue to

be successful in the future.

Once again our thoughts turn to those members who, for various health reasons, are not able to join with us on Anzac Day. We would hope that our newsletters help you to keep in touch and we will all be thinking of you as we, again, enjoy some of the camaraderie which was such an outstanding feature of our service whilst with 26 Battalion.

## NEWS FROM PERTH

By BOB FROOME

**W**HEN **Les Smith, Dick Hicks** and I joined the Bn at Brisbane I was put in with **Norm Snell's** tent and he and I were given a few days training on 2 inch mortars.

When we got to Torokina and then up to Pearl Ridge, Les, Dick and I were left behind to clean up the camp area and went up to the Ridge after the Company had left earlier in the day. Les Smith had told me on that day and also in Brisbane while on our final leave that he would be the first casualty.

While on the Ridge it became clear that 2 inch mortars were not heavy enough due to the heavy jungle cover. I then became a leading scout for two patrols along the Ridge to the West. I was a guard escort for the first jeep ambulance for a wounded Cpl or Sgt a 8pm at night and then helped to carry the stretcher down to the road and we came back later - a "hairy ride" at night.

When we came back to Torokina, **Norm, Ted Faehrman** and I did a two day crash course on Morse code and then we were then called Sigs. When we got to Puto Beach area I did a patrol inland with **Lt George Scrace**, B Coy, then towards the bottom of Soraken, did a night landing with **Graham Searles** into the Soraken and the night landing on Saposa where **Percy Druhan**

was killed. I later wrote to his brother and told him about Percy's loss. Did patrols across to Ratsua and then across to Ruri Bay and back to the main North track.

Did several patrols with **Devvy Meares** and was with him the night the Jap mortars and ours were firing and cut the phone wires. The Arty sig and I went out in search of the ends of the wires, a wire in each hand until we found and joined the correct ends.

That night I nearly got wiped out, a mortar landed close by and I was buried in the mud. I also had a close call the night the jeep driver was killed whilst refuelling the jeep when a Jap shell went through the petrol drum and exploded and wounded him in the stomach (he died later). The nose cone of the shell came through the roof of the tent I was sitting in writing a letter home. I moved when I heard the shell coming - it went through the bunk I was sitting on, I picked it up, it was still hot and could read the letters of the setting on the end of it, about the size of my hand.

I had a four day job as guard to four boys laying cable from Ratsua North and was on many patrols with different platoons. Did two trips for **Dave Feather** who became sick once and broke his false teeth the second time. I was coming out with a patrol and we were near the Salvos tent on the side of the track having a cuppa when **Norm Downey** told me I had to go back again as Dave was not able to take his place, I was not happy about that. I also did one of the last patrols North the day the 27th Bn relieved us and was not too pleased when some of those boys were making a noise cutting down trees and talking loud. Pte Les Smith died of wounds 7/1/45.

## Statue link with 26 Battalion

A bronze statue honouring the war hero and former commanding officer of 26 Battalion, **LtCol Harry Murray** was officially unveiled on 24 February 2006 by His Excellency Major General Michael Jeffery AC CVO MC, Governor-General of the Commonwealth of Australia. On the occasion the Governor General said, "It is indeed a special privilege to be here today to unveil the statue dedicated to the memory of the late Lieutenant Colonel Harry Murray, VC, CMG, DSO and Bar, DCM, Croix de Guerre, and four times Mentioned in Despatches, as an enduring testimony to a truly remarkable Australian. In the short space of three and a half years he rose from a Private soldier (machine gunner) to Lieutenant Colonel

in command of a machine gun battalion of 64 guns."

He continued to say, "As a former infantry and special forces soldier, I stand in awe of Harry Murray's achievements as a combat soldier. His repeated gallantry under the most horrific conditions of World War One – trench warfare, heavy machine gun fire and incessant artillery bombardment, mud, lice and foot rot, is the stuff of legend. His love and support of his soldiers and his personal humility are the endearing qualities of an exceptional man."

Because of his bravery in WWI he was known as "Mad" Harry and later became Australia's most decorated soldier. Notwithstanding his decorations he was a shy retiring Australian.

Murray, born in 1880, started as a private in Gallipoli and rose to Lieutenant-Colonel in charge of a battalion in France in 1918. On 28 June 1939 LtCol Murray was appointed CO of the newly formed 26 Battalion as part of 11 Brigade. On August 17 1942 he relinquished command of 26 Bn and handed over to Lt Col John Abbott. Murray then joined the VDC and served until 7 Feb 1944 and again retired from active military duty. He also joined a group of volunteer bushmen around North Queensland in case the Japanese landed. He finally returned to his property at Glenlyon near Richmond in Nth Queensland. Sadly he died as a result of a car accident in January 1966.

He certainly was a remarkable man and had a habit of walking around the unit in shorts, no shirt with his medals in a sugar bag.

*Below is the Herald Sun report*

# Harry, hero of heroes

"MAD" Harry Murray returned to his birthplace yesterday, frozen in bronze.

One of the bravest Allied soldiers of World War I, Lt-Col Murray could have been a civic leader after the war.

But his fame as the most highly decorated soldier in the British empire soon faded because of his modesty.

He was happy to be an outback grazier.

He never marched on Anzac Day, preferring to stay on his Queensland property and remember lost mates.

So yesterday another distinguished former soldier, Governor-General Michael Jeffery, led Lt-Col Murray's descendants back to their

**Neil Wilson**

family's historic home, the town of Evandale in northern Tasmania.

Among about 100 Murrays was Harry's son Doug, 75, his jacket weighed down by his dad's war medals.

The Victoria Cross, the Distinguished Conduct Medal, the Distinguished Service Order (with bar) and the French Croix de Guerre all hung from his right breast.

Lt-Col Murray was also made a Companion of the Order of St Michael and St George – a British order of chivalry – in 1919.

Harry Murray started as a private at Gallipoli and rose to be a lieutenant-colonel in charge of a battalion in France in March, 1918.

"I never saw him wear those medals and I don't really feel I have the right," said Doug, who took over his dad's farm. "But I'm very proud he's got this recognition."

Doug Murray came with his sister, Clem Sutherland, from Queensland, with other relatives from interstate, London and Greece to see the Governor-General unveil the statue.

Sculptor Peter Corlett fashioned the statue in his North Fitzroy studio.

The statue stands in a park near the corner of Murray St, named after the family as settlers near Launceston in 1820.



The statue shows "Mad" Harry leading his troops at Stormy Trench near Gueudecourt, France. For his actions on February 4-5, 1917, he was awarded a VC.

The then Capt Murray was battling a fever of 40C when his company captured the enemy position. He rallied his troops against repeated enemy counter-attacks, leading

bombing and bayonet parties and also carried wounded to safety.

Maj-Gen Jeffery said: "As a former infantry and special forces soldier, I stand in awe of Harry Murray's achievements as a combat soldier."

What pleased Doug Murray was an inscription below the statue: "In memory of all those who served".



**Recognition:** Doug Murray (left) and Clem Sutherland with the statue of their father, war hero Lt-Col Harry Murray, Governor-General Michael Jeffery (left) at the unveiling. Pictures: STEVE DIXON

## MCG HONOURS SIR BERNARD

The former CO of 26 Bn, the late LtCol **Sir Bernard Callinan** has been honoured by having the main Bar at the newly constructed member's wing at the Melbourne Cricket Ground named after him. It is known as Bernie's Bar and he would indeed be very pleased for this honour.

Callinan had successfully led the 26 Battalion with amphibious landings against the Japanese on the Soraken Peninsula.

He received the Companion of the Distinguished Service Order, Military Cross and was Mentioned in Dispatches. Knighted in 1977, Sir Bernard Callinan was a former President of the MCC (1980-85) and a consulting civil engineer who managed the construction of the 1967 Western Stand. Sir Bernard oversaw the Olympic Dining Rooms, the erection of the light towers and took the decision to build the Australian Gallery of Sport.

## PERTH MEMORIAL BENCH



26 Bn plaque on the memorial bench in Kings Park, Perth. Kindly installed by **Bob Froome** it reads:

*This plaque is dedicated to the gallant men of the 26 Aust. Inf. Bn. (AIF) who under the inspired leadership served with distinction in Dutch New Guinea, Torres Strait, Bougainville and Rabaul 1939-1944 and to the members who made the supreme sacrifice. LEST WE FORGET.*



## REMEMBRANCE DAY 2005



*In Warragul on 11 November 2005, Nick Andrade, David Polson and Bob Gaudion stand in tribute to fallen war heroes.*



*Queensland Boys: David Watt, Keith Locke and Tom Nobby Clark*

### VALE

Tom Jones  
Cath Searles  
R.E. Pressley

R.W. Francis  
Alan Murchison