

26 Battalion Association  
Victorian Branch

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

# NEWSLETTER

OCTOBER 2006

ISSUE 9



Although taken a few years ago, this picture is a beauty.

*ANZAC DAY 2002, Melbourne*

*John Collins, Laurie Hill, Len Dawson, Ray Block, Bob Gaudion, Bill Johnson and Ken Leversha*

## WELCOME to *Newsletter No. 9.*

The flow of material has dried up a bit for this newsletter so, as always, your contributions are welcome for the next one in April.

The Queensland contingent are welcome to submit articles too since their newsletter has ceased publication. Please send your contributions to The Editor, **Norm Turrell**.

## SEVEN VETERANS AT LUNCH REUNION

By COLIN BLOCK

Seven veterans of 26 Battalion recalled old times and caught up with each other's events of the previous year at luncheon in a South Melbourne hotel on ANZAC Day 2006.

It started with a beautiful sunny Melbourne autumn day that helped make 2006 ANZAC Day to be yet another successful

reunion for 26 Bn.

The veterans who marched the long walk from Collins St to the Shrine were **Jack Vicary, Ken Mac Kellin, John Collins and Len Dawson**. Joining them were **Vin Frawly and Bob Gaudion** who took a ride in a vintage military truck behind the group.

The March had a few

more noticeable delays this year and Jack Vicary said, "I hate it when they slow down to a crawl. We oldies like a bit of pace so that we don't lose balance."

Jack Vicary had the honour of leading the Battalion. In all eighteen people marched behind the 26 Battalion banner that was carried by **Jeff Collings** (for **John Collings** (dec.)) and **David Stevens** (for **Norm Barbore** (dec.)).

Smartly dressed in their Scout uniforms, assisting the banner holders were **Jennifer** and **Tim Schwinghammer** marching on behalf of their great-great granduncle, **Percy Cherry**, VC and MC, a captain in 26 Bn. during WWI.

**Gary Bradshaw** was proud to march for his father **Archie** (dec.) and the Dawson, Frawley and Block families all had good representation.

Following the parade, the banner was taken to the 26 Battalion tree near the Shrine where everyone gathered for the annual session of photographs, although the bright dappled light filtering through the leaves played havoc with some of the photos.

The reunion lunch at Bells Hotel in South Melbourne was held in a much quieter section than in previous years which was much better for those hard of hearing.

Victorian Representative, **Gavin Block** led the group in a minute's silence to remember those who had

fallen, particularly those from the 26 Bn.

Bob Gaudion read out the apologies and short report of the Victorian branch.

Hanging onto a bottle of oxygen and very recently out of hospital, **Ray Block** was able to make the reunion luncheon with assistance from his wife **Shirley** and grandson **Dean**.

The efforts of **Elizabeth Davies** were appreciated for going the extra mile to take some of the veterans home after the reunion.



*Above:*  
*Ina Dawson pins on Len's medals on ANZAC Day 2006*

*Below: The Flyover on ANZAC Day April 2006*

## **A MESSAGE FROM THE JUNIOR VICE PRESIDENT**

By BOB GAUDION

Over a number of years our President, **Bill Johnson** and his wife, Secretary, **Lola**, have written and forwarded to all members a newsletter giving details of activities and events of our Association.

These newsletters have kept all members advised of the activities of the Association and have been particularly of interest to those members who are not able to attend Anzac Day gatherings etc.

I regret to advise that, because of the continuing ill health of our President,

Bill, these newsletters will not be able to be sent out in the future.

Many thanks indeed from all the members, Lola, Bill and your family, for your efforts to keep us all informed of what the Association has been doing to acknowledge the contribution of all those who served with 26 Battalion during World War 2 and, in particular, to perpetuate the memory of those members who made the supreme sacrifice.

Well done, indeed.

# Battle of the Somme 90th Anniversary

To commemorate the 90th Anniversary of the beginning of the Battle of the Somme, on 1 July 2006 the Herald Sun newspaper ran this centre page report on Cpt. Percy Cherry, VC, MC.

Cpt. Cherry died in action on 27 March 1917 on the day that it was announced that he had won the Military Cross and was later awarded the Victoria Cross posthumously.

Back then D. J. Keyes of 26 Battalion wrote a letter of sympathy to Mrs Cherry that expressed his admiration with these words, "Captain Percy Cherry was the bravest man I ever met."

Journalist John Hamilton, reported in the Herald Sun that Cpt. Cherry's niece, Bronwyn Large, has a collection of his personal items including a letter that he wrote from the battlefield. Sent to his sister Lizzie, Cpt Cherry wrote, "The bullets are flying past just like so many bees. They have such a sweet little hum, just about as nice as you would expect from a bee you have just robbed of his honey ..."

Relatives of Cpt. Cherry have marched in recent ANZAC Day Parades in Melbourne.


Below is the Herald Sun report from 1 July 2006

30 HERALD SUN, Saturday, July 1, 2006

SATURDAY

HERALD SUN, Saturday, July 1, 2006

## A LETTER FROM THE FRONT TO A GRIEVING MOTHER ... AND FROM A BRAVE BROTHER ... AND A PROUD KING



**Dear Mrs Cherry**

I AM sorry to make an apology for not writing to you sooner. I have been so busy with my heartbreak at the loss of your son that I have not had time to write to you. I have been so busy with my heartbreak at the loss of your son that I have not had time to write to you.

When you look over the company to which I have been attached to, you will see that I have been attached to the company to which I have been attached to.


**My dear sister,**

Your sweet little letter to hand - indeed you look me by surprise for I have not heard from you for some time. I am not writing to you now - I am not writing to you now - I am not writing to you now.

**May 31, 1917**

Respected Mother, I have been so busy with my heartbreak at the loss of your son that I have not had time to write to you.

# Percy Cherry, the bravest of them all




**Percy Cherry**

His medals were displayed in the window of the shop where he was born.

Ninety years ago today, one of the deadliest chapters in the history of war began. Many Australians lost their lives, including Capt Percy Cherry, the bravest soldier of all, as **JOHN HAMILTON** writes

**T**HERE is silence in the small town of Perth where today Mrs Cherry's home is a quiet place. The house is a simple, two-story building, with a photograph of her son, Captain Percy Cherry, VC, MC, hanging on the wall.

It is a quiet place, a place of peace and tranquility, a place where the memories of a brave soldier are kept alive.



**Late** Percy Cherry in his military uniform, wearing the Victoria Cross and Military Cross.

**Right:** Percy's sister Lizzie, who changed her name to Mrs Keyes, with her husband and children.

**Left:** Percy Cherry with his two sons, the youngest of whom was killed in action.

As a young man, he had a dream of becoming a soldier. He joined the 11th Battalion in 1914 and served in France during the Battle of the Somme.

On March 27, 1917, he was killed in action during the Battle of Arras. He was the only Australian to win the Victoria Cross during the battle.

## A TRIBUTE TO RAY BLOCK

By NORMAN TURRELL

Almost every unit had its own set of characters, invariably they were given nick names which identified them for various reasons. Many of these names were used with affection, respect and in recognition of the way they responded to their comrades. Even on parade nick names were used occasionally rather than rank or surname. The 26 Bn had its share of these characters to name a few. Poddy Burton Nobby Clark, Boncey Bradford, Scotty Dooley, Slim Ruddick, Snow Brady, Spot Webb, Sandy Osborne, The Black Prince, Hoot Gibson, Old Dave, Bud Abbot, Frosty Harrison, Scrubby Taylor, Silver Lewis, Lally Rogers, Spud Murphy, Google Needham, Curley Butler, Bud Muhling, Bunny Savage, Darkie Hall, Hoppy Hopkins, Togo Thompson, Darky Wilson, Snow Graham, Dixie Lea, and so on.

The list would not be complete without Blocky. His loud voice was easily heard above others. He had an air of wanting to be in everything, he was the voice of 9 Platoon.

When he arrived at 26 Battalion fresh out of Canungra he had the reputation of being a wild sort of guy, but that was a veneer to cover a sensitive person with a heart of gold towards his fellow man. He was often asked to take promotion but he declined as it would mean a change in his relationship with his comrades.

Towards the end of the war there was one set of Lance Corporals stripes left in the box and he finally accepted his promotion.

As his platoon commander I can recall him on patrol in the point position with his boots off so he could sneak up on the Japs.

He was fearless and became a legend in that role. Laurie Hill and a few others know why Blocky asked Laurie for a lend of his pliers, but that remains a secret. On another occasion when the Bn stopped for a meal break in Townsville the train took off without Blocky. Next thing we know here is Blocky running after the train with a bottle of Rum in each hand. The train slowed for Blocky to clamber aboard and he avoided being AWOL.

In Tanahmerah Blocky was always at the table for the dice and card games to make sure there was no cheating. He looked like a soldier and was typical of the Aussie infantryman.

He brought humour and mateship to all

around him. His special mates include Jack Vicary, Bob Dryburg, Ken Flakemore, Norm Donaldson, Wally Heritage, Wally Rogers, Cecil Slaven Bob Gaudion, Roy Cotton, Frosty Harrison. They will miss him for sure.

With the war over he married Shirley and settled down to married life. He had troubles during those early years but he overcame them and enjoyed many hobbies and had a great love of family.

During the early stage of the unit history production he was invaluable for his efforts, ask him to do something, a few days later, a phone call "It's done", that's how he operated.

At his funeral the church was overflowing with people from all walks of life to show respect for his life and what he did for others. He has invested his ideals in his son Colin and grandson Gavin who have taken on various duties in our Association, we are in good hands for the future of our Association.

Well Done Blocky, Rest easy Mate. With Respect. The Editor.



*Ray Block and Cecil Slavin in 1945*

**VALE**

Bob Bakhsh

Ray Block