



RECONNAISSANCE

Summer 2013

The Newsletter of the Military History Society of New South Wales Incorporated

PATRON: Her Excellency Professor Marie Bashir AC CVO, Governor of New South Wales

PRESIDENT: Benjamin Howell – **SECRETARY:** John Twyford – **TREASURER:** Alan Kitchen

EDITOR: Harry Taplin – **PUBLISHER:** John Twyford

THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The Society's forty-fourth Annual General Meeting was held on 9 February 2013 and the President's Annual Report along with the financial statements presented are printed below.

The election of Office Bearers and Councillors was conducted by the Vice-President in the course of the meeting with the following people elected:

President: Benjamin Howell

Secretary: John Twyford

Treasurer: Alan Kitchen

Council Members: Harry Taplin, Joseph Crumlin, James Roche and Kevin Smith

Two Vice Presidents and three Councillors are still to be elected and will be appointed at a later date.

BENJAMIN HOWELL

PRESIDENT'S REPORT ON BEHALF OF THE COUNCIL

At the outset I would like to pay tribute to Mr Paul Waterhouse who during the two years of his presidency has made a sterling contribution to the working of the Society. The Council and the membership of the Society will miss Paul's imaginative and enthusiastic approach to the office. It is now my pleasure to report to the Annual General Meeting on our progress over the last twelve months.

Early in 2012 our Patron Brigadier Philip Carey stood down as Patron of the Society after 11 years of service. Brigadier Carey's contribution to the

Society has been significant, not only as our Patron, but as publisher of *Reconnaissance*, and, periodically, as a respected historical lecturer. His advice and friendship has been greatly valued by all in the Council and we thank him unreservedly for his contribution.

We have a new Patron, her Excellency Professor Marie Bashir AC CVO, Governor of NSW, who has graciously agreed to grant Vice-Regal Patronage to the Military History Society of NSW Inc.

The Council has continued its efforts to provide interest to our members and to make the Military History Society an attractive proposition for new participants.

Our monthly meetings have attracted interesting speakers covering such diverse topics as:

1. *The Punic Wars*
2. *Napoleon's invasion of Russia*
3. *The rise of the warplane*
4. *Flying Australians to war: 58 years of the QANTAS RAAF troop transport wing 1937-1995*
5. *How arms and armour won the battle of Marathon*
6. *The battle of Milne Bay*
7. *Bringing it home: Australia under attack*

Our flagship event – the Brigadier Howard Memorial Lecture – was given by Professor Robert O'Neill AM on the topic of *Afghanistan: An Historical Context*. These lectures were all well attended by our enthusiastic membership.

The level of interest was clearly demonstrated with speakers answering questions well after their presentations had concluded.

Our program for 2013 is equally diverse, with lectures on: King Richard III (the Battle of Bosworth Field), Biographies of Australia's Lost Generation, the Peloponnesian War, the Dambusters, the English Civil War, the American Civil War and Vietnam being arranged.

This interest shown by members in our activities is encouraging; as it makes us confident that we will continue to increase our membership in the coming year.

We are also, for the first time, reaching out to undergraduate university students through an Essay Competition. It is our hope that this competition will increase the recognition of our Society and encourage a younger generation of members to participate.

As the financial report will reveal since 2007 the Society's bank accounts have become increasingly healthy. This is an excellent outcome and it has given Council flexibility to explore opportunities to grow and to increase services to members.

The newsletter *Reconnaissance*, which has been circulated each quarter, continues to keep our members informed of all of our activities. The material published has increased with contributions from our members on family war histories and the wide range of books available on military history for review.

The Society's website: www.mhsnsw.info is under review and it is intended to increase its content to make it a valuable resource for students wishing to know more about military history and to promote the activities of the Society to the wider community. Although this is a relatively simple site at present, we will be able to upload past copies of *Reconnaissance*, correspondence, submissions, articles and speeches.

The work of the Society has been prosecuted by the Council with dedication and commitment. Equally, it is acknowledged that it is the members who make the Society and without whose support we would not exist.

BENJAMIN HOWELL

IMPORTANT NOTE

Ms Preis from the Richard III and Plantagenet Societies is attending a seminar in England on the recent discovery of King Richard III's remains and for that reason the March lecture of the Society will be delayed one week until 16 March 2013.

'The Leicester Dig: the conclusion of a 500 year old mystery' would start with King Richard's death at Bosworth and the records of what happened to his body afterwards: then the dig, and eventually the results of the scientific investigation revealing that his body had indeed been found.

It is expected that the lecture will be well attended so it is essential that the Society be notified of your intention to attend.

Please contact the Secretary, John Twyford, by telephone on **02 9660 7225** or by email at john.twyford@uts.edu.au

If you are travelling by car we will need to notify the barracks of your registration number for you to get parking in the grounds.

JOHN TWYFORD

PROGRAM OF EVENTS

| | | |
|--------------------------------|-------------------|---|
| Saturday, 16 March 2013 | Ms Dorothea Preis | King Richard III, 'The Leicester Dig' |
| Saturday, 13 April 2013 | Dr Ross McMullen | Farewell, Dear People: Biographies of Australia's Lost Generation |

MILITARY HISTORY SOCIETY OF NEW SOUTH WALES (INC)

ABN 51 558 007 698

Statement of Assets and Liabilities

as at 31 December 2012

| 2011 | | 2012 |
|----------------------|--|-------------|
| | Members' Funds | |
| \$20,990.09 | Balance at 31 December | \$25,091.70 |
| | <i>which are represented by:</i> | |
| | Current Assets | |
| \$20,629.49 | Cash at Bank – ANZ *NOTE 1 | \$24,830.10 |
| \$360.60 | Book Stocks – at Estimated Realisation Value *NOTE 2 | \$261.60 |
| \$20,990.09 | | \$25,091.70 |
| | Less Current Liabilities | |
| – | Subscriptions in Advance | – |
| \$20,990.09 | Excess of Assets over Liabilities | \$25,091.70 |
| Total Members | As at 31 December 2012 | 88 |
| NOTE 1 | Current account | \$5,867.27 |
| | V2 Interest Bearing Account | \$18,962.83 |
| | | \$24,830.10 |
| NOTE 2 | <i>Estimation of book values as follows:</i> | |
| | 2012 Realisation Value | \$360.60 |
| | 2012 Total Value | \$721.20 |
| | 2012 Sales | \$198.00 |
| | 2012 Purchases | – |
| | 2013 Total Value | \$523.20 |
| | 2013 Realisation Value (50% of total) | \$261.60 |

BENJAMIN HOWELL, PRESIDENT

Statement of Receipts and Payments

for the year ended 31 December 2012

| 2011 | | 2012 |
|-------------|--|--------------|
| \$17,824.10 | Balance brought forward | \$20,629.49 |
| | ADD RECEIPTS | |
| | Subscriptions | |
| | \$2,640.00 Current | \$2,890.00 |
| | – Advance | – |
| \$2,640.00 | – Joining Fees | – \$2,890.00 |
| | Other Income | |
| | \$450.10 Book Sales | \$198.00 |
| | \$1,595.00 Donations | \$1,375.00 |
| | \$432.37 Bank Interest | \$525.30 |
| | – Royalty Revenue | – |
| | \$952.95 Social Activities | \$938.45 |
| \$6,070.42 | – Sundries | \$3.35 |
| \$23,894.52 | | \$3,040.10 |
| | | \$5,930.10 |
| | | \$26,559.59 |
| | LESS PAYMENTS | |
| | Cost of Administration | |
| | \$603.00 Insurance | \$550.00 |
| | \$116.00 Postage | \$93.00 |
| | \$38.40 Printing | – |
| | \$82.80 Website | \$69.50 |
| | \$5.25 Stationery | – |
| \$893.45 | \$48.00 Sundries | – \$712.50 |
| | Cost of Despatch / Reconnaissance | |
| | \$514.50 Printing | – |
| | \$149.90 Postage | – |
| \$664.40 | – Other | – |
| | Other Expenses | |
| \$80.30 | Book Purchases | – |
| \$1,321.88 | Social Activities | \$946.99 |
| \$305.00 | Subscriptions | \$70.00 |
| \$3,265.03 | Sundries | – |
| | | \$1,729.49 |
| \$20,629.49 | Balance at Bank 31 December 2012 | \$24,830.10 |

NOTE 3

| | |
|---------------------------|-------------|
| Total receipts for year | \$ 5,930.10 |
| Total payments for year | \$ 1,729.49 |
| | |
| Profit / (Loss) for 20112 | \$ 4,200.61 |

BENJAMIN HOWELL, PRESIDENT

FAMILY MILITARY HISTORY

Mr Harry Taplin continues the family history series commenced last year in *Reconnaissance*. The material is based on oral history recorded by Harry during interviews with survivors of the 60th Battalion, 15th Brigade, 5th Division, 1st AIF. Harry's father served in that 60th Battalion in WWI. Here are two contrasting accounts of the voyage over to 'Over There.'

The first account:

We went to Port Melbourne to embark on a ship called the Nestor. It was her first trip as a troopship and they had a Chinese crew. When they knew they were going into a war zone they just wanted to get off the boat. Anyhow they had to read the Riot Act over them and kept them under guard all the time they were at sea.

We had a rough passage through the Bight and eventually arrived at Port Suez and we disembarked and were taken by train from there to Cairo.

On the boat before we arrived in Egypt there was a chap by the name of Tom Dawson who was a comedian and he'd travelled around the world on different shows and he knew what went along in every city. So he said: 'I want to have a talk to you kids' and tell you what you are going to face up to when you get to Cairo. Anyhow, he told us we would go to the Wozzer that's where all the brothels were and he said I want to let you know that there'll be all sorts of diseases you can collect by going and using these women so I want to tell you to take precautions and which you can get supplies from the Battalion before you go on leave or anything ...

After the evacuation from Gallipoli ... we went on a train to Alexandria, embarked and we started off to go to France. The first day out there was a submarine scare and they scattered and the boat I was on eventually got into Malta in the outer harbour. We were anchored there for three days and then eventually three British torpedo boats came and we started off again to Malta. The three torpedo boats just circled around us till we arrived in Marseilles. Then we were put on a train to a place called Steenbecque about thirty miles beyond the front lines.

When we arrived in France we didn't have steel helmets or gas masks or anything like that. We eventually got issued with them and given all the instructions about how to use your gas mask, which was just like a sugar bag, the first one they had.

We went on and marched the thirty miles from Steenbecque to a place called Fleurbaix. Then we were carting up ammunition and all sorts of barbed wire entanglements you name it we carried it up to the front line preparing for this stunt ...

The second account, much later in the war:

After final embarkation leave this young soldier required urgent dental treatment, which resulted in him being taken off the embarkation draft. His story continues:

This was horrifying news and I asked to see the Officer in Charge of this reinforcement, a Captain Simpson but although sympathetic he could do nothing. I obtained a leave pass, went to my Aunt Olive's home to tell her my troubles. I telephoned my uncle in Horsham, he was a junior partner in the Stock and Station firm of Hegelthorn and Bolton. Hegelthorn was a Member of Parliament. An hour or so later my uncle rang back; arrangements had been made for me to speak to a Mr Menzies next morning. The number given to me was the Federal Members' Rooms in Parliament.

When he grasped that I was NOT asking him to get me OFF the draft but to get back ON he readily agreed to help. When I returned to camp, I was included in the 9th Re-enforcements of the 60th Battalion and I learnt a lesson. Never ask a politician to interfere on a soldier's behalf in army matters. Captain Simpson made it very clear that interference in army matters was simply not on.

So we were all ready to move – and to trick the wily Hun, we were taken by train to Sydney and after a couple of days fooling or being fooled around, we embarked on the troopship Port Melbourne, the A16, an old slow about 6,000 ton cargo vessel – top speed 9 knots. We were issued with hammocks, which we hung above the dining tables in the troop deck.

Breakfast consisted of porridge, bread, jam and tea, midday – stew with potatoes, carrots and onions, sometimes rabbit instead of mutton.

The Orderly Officer usually came around at breakfast – ‘Any complaints?’ One dope on one occasion said yes ‘I found a piece of rabbit fur and skin in the stew’. The Orderly Officer, I think it was Lieutenant Charlie Buchanan of Geelong replied: ‘keep it and collect some more and make your missus a fur coat’. Tea 5.00 pm tea bread and jam – Rosella’s worst batch, sugar was always light although we carried a cargo. Still fooling the Hun, outside the Heads the ship was steered south – after several days steaming, where we expected to run into ice, we headed west.

Our company commander, Captain Simpson was a health and fitness believer. The daily routine was 5.00 am on your feet, stow hammocks, remove all clothing, parade on deck, then it was his pleasure to play follow my leader, with himself as leader, in single file around the decks, up and down gangways, in cold, mist, fog or rain no let up – the further south we sailed the colder it became. Then showers were permitted, salt water only – no time allowed for shaving. I was lucky, two shaves a week sufficed for me to pass inspection. Shaving with an issue cut throat razor in cold seawater was not funny. To further confuse the enemy the ship called at Albany to pick up further re-enforcements. We were rather crowded by this time and again we headed for the Antarctic.

Our unexpected arrival at the port of Durban broke the monotony. The popular and famous Miss Campbell, vigorously semaphoring us a welcome, was a happy event and after docking, shore leave was given. Durban ladies handed out fruit, apples, oranges, pineapples etc. also tea and homemade scones. The troops went for rickshaw rides in a big way. Likely looking horses were selected, races arranged, with a few former bookies giving the odds. Fun while it lasted, but when some winners bought beer for the horses, the local police interfered – they were supported by some tough British and South African Military Police. It was all very hush hush.

Early one morning, the Port Melbourne sneaked out and sailed for Capetown for coaling. We were let loose on the town, did the shops and saw the sights. Next stop was Sierra Leone – teaming rain – hot and steamy – no shore leave.

I think we picked up an escort warship – it never ventured close but looked a battered old four-funnelled rust bucket. More submarine lookouts and constant drill.

When we crossed the equator, there was the usual Father Neptune nonsense. The sailors were rough barbers. Efforts to form entertainment parties for troops were a flop though boxing bouts were popular.

Seven weeks on the water now and we were all wondering if the captain knew the way to England. He resented being asked and objected to being advised to try steaming backwards. If we had an anti submarine gun aboard I don’t remember seeing it, but some naval ratings come on board at Sierra Leone. They could have been cooks, which were badly needed.

I had a day or two of fatigue duty, carrying bundles of frozen rabbits and huge frozen fish from refrigerators up steep steps to the galley. It was really hard work, especially the fish, which were hard and slippery. That night we had curry – made strong to distinguish the taste of the meat – it would have made a welcome change if the cooks had remembered to put the potatoes in an hour earlier. A good culinary maxim – if you put whole potatoes with their jackets on in a stew, it is a good plan to wash the dirt off first.

Anyone reading this will think we were a hell of a long time reaching England and we were happy to disembark, I think at Southampton, where we discovered how tiring it was to march with a full kit and carry a kit bag. On wobbly legs we entrained for Salisbury Plain. The train passed through Birmingham where a crowd gave us a great reception.

Eventually off the train and marched into camp at Codford near Wilton. The beautiful smell of damp earth, leaves and grass with a background smell of cows, made some of our cow cockies feel homesick. Arrived in camp and dispersed into galvanised iron huts, issued with bed boards and blankets. Tea issued – the beds are ever so much harder than hammocks. I am happy to find that half of the men in the hut are old friends.

HARRY TAPLIN

FAMILY MILITARY HISTORY Cont ...

Mr Alan Kitchen submitted the following article. We acknowledge that it first appeared in the Anzac Memorial, Peace Edition, September 1919, published by the NSW Branch Returned Sailors and Soldiers Imperial League of Australia.

AN ANZAC IN FRANCE

On July 11, 1916, six of us from the 54th Battalion, all old hands, were sent to Paris to represent our unit at the big Republic Day review of Allied troops, which was held on July 14. Altogether, there were about 50 Australians from the different brigades in the Fifth Division, which, it might be stated, was the only Australian division represented. We were given a brush-up in ceremonial drill by a sergeant major of the Grenadier Guards, and we shaped well. On July 13 we reached gay Paris, and found that the British detachment was about 1500 strong and comprised representatives of all the colonies, and home troops. There never was a smarter crowd.

All the way from the station to the Caserne Popeniere Barracks the street on either side was packed with people shouting 'Vive l'Englise!' 'Vive la Canadie!' 'Vive l'Australie!' and a lot of other things which we didn't compree. At the barracks we were put up, and provided with good food, beer, and wine; and after trying to jabber to the people outside the barrack windows we turned in.

Next morning was 'The Day' of France's Republic. And the people soon let us know it was a day of rejoicing. Everything else went by the board on this day. We marched from the barracks to the Palais des Invalides – a large square, in which are beautiful statues. After us came Belgian troops, Russians (fine men), French, and the other Allies. We all formed up, and presented arms to President Poincaire, who walked between the ranks with bared head, rain pouring down all the time. He was accompanied by a high Russian general, whose left breast was covered with medals. A half-hour later, at noon, we filed out of the square with the Belgian troops at the head of our huge procession. Then we were greeted by cheers - the French cheer is something like the Australian hoot - and cries went up, and flowers came down, every where.

The crowd on each side was incredibly dense. It took an hour for the whole column to pass a given point, and yet we were doing a good three-mile-an-hour travel. We marched at the slope, with our packs up (Needless to say, these were light, though square). At the Place de la Republique we formed up and had a half-hour's stay. Then it was back to the barracks in motor wagons. Leave was granted from 1.30 to 8.00 pm. As we had no money, we requested the atmosphere (sic) to answer the 'luridly pronounced question: 'What are we here for? We say again, what are we here for?' For we did not know how to pass the time, cashless, in such a large, strange and foreign place. However, the people soon set us at ease once we were outside the barrack gates. An English lady took three of us around. We walked around the Eiffel Tower - a huge and splendid structure - and had a short trip on the River Seine, a ride on the tube railway, and a long taxi-ride, followed by a tour through Heaven on the big joy-wheel, which goes around slowly, stopping at intervals so that the views of Paris can be appreciated.

The outing was glorious, especially after Gallipoli from the Landing to the Evacuation. We had tea with our fair guide. She drank wine and smoked cigarettes; but as this is the habit of Parisian women, it is not remarkable. We thanked our benefactress, and left her - where? Just outside the barrack gates, as she was dead struck on one chap.

The long yarn among ourselves that night as to how we had spent the day showed that everybody had enjoyed himself; and indeed it was no fault of the French people if he did not.

Next day we were paid; a microscope produced by one k-nut (sic) revealing in the hand of each Anzac a mean and measly 12 francs (10s.). Leave was granted again, from noon to 5.30 pm. We were informed that we should light out for Hun-gore (sic) on the next morning, so, especially since our 'Heads' would not pay us, we decided to make it a welter. Some of us did not get back to barracks till after midnight. Result - five of us before the CO next morning. Apart from this affair, however, the conduct, of the troops right through was excellent. No drunken brawls marred our trip to Paris - the gayest city in the world.

The people there are simply lovable - that is, to a chap in khaki; and mark you the old slouch hat was well in the swim. It seemed to catch the eye quickly. It was nothing extraordinary to see one of our chaps walking down the street with a French lassie on either arm. These girls have round fat faces, and are just a lovely armful.

But away with sentiment! We left Paris on July 16 at about 8.00 pm. It was still daylight, however - the twilight over here is very long, and the Daylight Saving Act is in full swing.

I shall never forget our trip back to the station, though a thousand artillery infernos should strive to blot out my memory. Again the streets were crowded. It was not long before our sections of fours were reduced to single file. I think I kissed half the pretty girls in Paris that night - not from choice, though. I had one on my arm right to the station, but that was nothing, as some chaps had two or three each, hanging to him wherever a portion of his pack or other equipment showed itself. Every few minutes a girl would fly at me, and plant a smack on whatever portion of my person she was nearest.

This would not have been so bad if the young Frenchmen had not forgotten themselves so far as to expect to be kissed too. One young chap put his dial out for a kiss, and I promptly pushed his face in. We reached the station at last in safety, covered with perspiration or glory. I say in safety, because it was a wonder some savage female, in her efforts to kiss us, did not tear off an arm or ear. It was awful - yet so pleasant. We reached our battalion on July 18, and learnt that we were just in time for a charge on the Huns' trenches.

That charge is now over. A charge more hellish I never was in. The shelling was awful. One particular section came out minus two NCO's, the sergeant being killed and the corporal wounded badly. Our losses were heavy. But so were Fritz's! And I am wearing a German belt. I cannot say any more, except that I feel sure that I have accounted for a couple of the curs, and am still well and strong. It was hot work.

In this trench we are wondering how our old mates are viewing us. It's grand to know you've shot at a few hundred Turks and a few dozen Germans, and I been in some of the biggest and damndest charges in history, and been kissed

and pelted with flowers by half the prettiest girls in the world between whiles! And I guess it's worthwhile being an Anzac.

CORPORAL HECTOR BREWER

RECENT MEETINGS OF THE SOCIETY

BRINGING IT HOME: AUSTRALIA UNDER ATTACK

For the first meeting of 2013, the Society was addressed by Mr Peter Grose on the topic *Bringing it Home: Australia Under Attack*. The topic was clearly a popular one as over 50 of our members attended.

The author has written two acclaimed books on the subject of Japanese attacks on the Australian mainland during WWII. The works were: *An Awkward Truth: The Bombing of Darwin, February 1942* and *A Very Rude Awakening: The Night The Japanese Midget Subs Came To Sydney Harbour*.

The books formed the basis of the talk. Darwin was a battle Australia would rather forget. Yet the Japanese attack on 19 February 1942 was the first wartime assault on Australian soil. The Japanese struck with the same carrier-borne force that devastated Pearl Harbor only ten weeks earlier. There was a difference. More bombs fell on Darwin, more civilians were killed, and more ships were sunk.

The talk was introduced by a detailed discussion of the Japanese war aims (apparently not an invasion of the Australian mainland as commonly thought). Even so, the attacks were widespread and extended across Northern Australia from Broome to Townsville. In all there were 97 attacks. In May of 1942, the war seemed very far away to most Sydney-siders - until the night the three Japanese midget submarines crept into the harbour and caused an unforgettable night of mayhem, high farce, chaos and courage.

Members who were unable to attend missed a fascinating lecture.

JOHN TWYFORD

BOOK REVIEW

BILL THE BASTARD

By Roland Perry

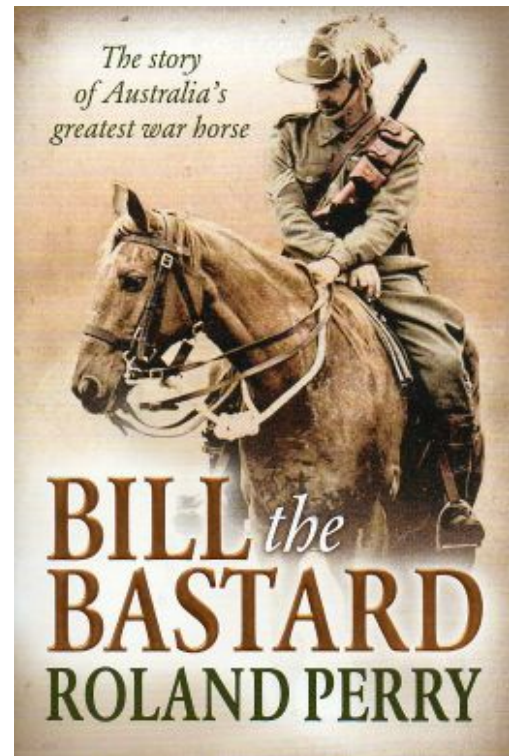
Allen & Unwin, 274pp RRP \$27.99 incl. GST

The well-known aphorism has it that you can't judge a book by its cover. Perhaps *Bill the Bastard* is an exception. The cover depicts a magnificent looking horse decked out in tack appropriate for battle. The rider makes an equally impressive image with his plumed slouch hat, bandolier and the barrel of a short magazine Lee Enfield visible over his shoulder. Altogether it is an impressive image. The text, however, is a little more difficult to fit into the canon of military history literature.

The basis of the story is the history of an Australian Waler (military horse) that became a legend with the Australian Desert Mounted Corps during the Palestinian campaign from 1914 to 1918. The epithet in Bill's name was a term of endearment but originally a reference to his propensity to throw riders. Woven into the narrative is a biographical sketch of the only soldier who could successfully ride Bill, namely, Major Michael Shanahan DSO and the officer in charge of remounts Major AB (Banjo) Patterson.

Whilst the narrative follows the well-documented events of the campaign, the author has supplemented those events with dialogue that is unlikely to have been part of any record. The story is spiced with a romantic interest. Even so, much of the information in the book is very interesting. The Waler is so named because it originated in New South Wales and the genetic history of this breed is given.

The story of the Australian soldiers' part in the riot and burning of the red light district of Cairo (the so-called battle of Wazzir) is always worth retelling. It is suggested that Shanahan (then a lieutenant) had a hand in quelling the riot. It seems Bill was used as a packhorse at Gallipoli and carried John Simpson's body back from the point where he and his donkey were hit by shrapnel. After a period as Major Shanahan's mount, Bill returned to being a packhorse carrying a machine gun at Beersheba and being part of the column of Light Horse that entered Damascus.



One incident, described in detail, is how Major Shanahan won his DSO. During the battle of Romani he rallied his men then carried two men mounted behind him and two holding the stirrups in darkness to safety. This incident is documented in the Official History vol. VII, chapter XI. The citation for the decoration further bears out the account:

For conspicuous gallantry in action. He organised and maintained the outpost line with the greatest courage and determination. Later he rescued several wounded men under very heavy fire. He was wounded.

It is clear that a horse of exceptional stamina would be needed to pull off such a rescue. The book concludes on the very sad note of how the mounts were disposed of at the conclusion of hostilities. Happily, it seems Bill may have survived with some dignity. Your reviewer found the book a very good read over the holiday period and some compensation for the fact that the trout were not rising.

JOHN TWYFORD

BOOK REVIEW

THE CHANGI CAMERA

By Tim Bowden

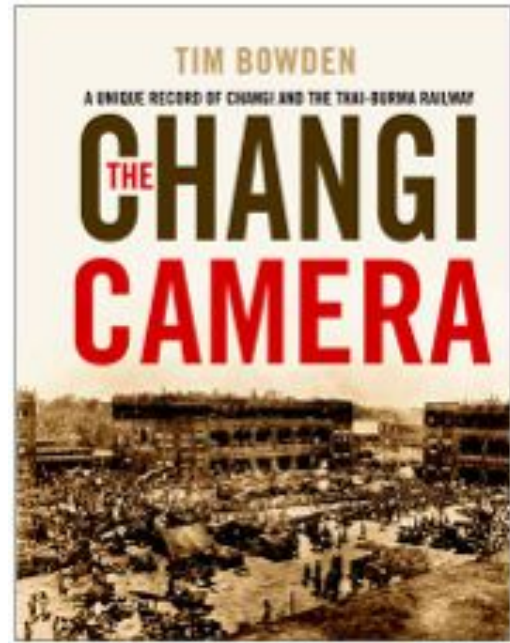
Hachette Australia, 242pp RRP \$35.00 incl. GST

This work is a reprint and revision of the author's earlier 1984 classic *Changi Photographer: George Aspinall's record of captivity*. It is, of course, the photographs that make the book, however, in this edition the photographs are supplemented by a narrative that gives an interesting overview of the life of the Australian Prisoners of War in the hands of the Japanese. There is considerable detail relating to George Aspinall's captivity and the extraordinary risk and ingenuity implicit in making the photographic record. The text is enriched by Aspinall's commentary on particular photographs.

The captivity has been the subject of many studies and books, scholarly and otherwise. Even so, the reader always finds something that he or she was not aware of. It is well known that the Japanese were taken by surprise when they become aware of the large number of prisoners they had on their hands. For this reason they left the Australian command structure in place.

The initial problem was boredom. This was overcome with reading classes, music lessons and the like. One problem that is not often mentioned is the fact that early in captivity the libido of the healthy young males gave rise to some homosexual incidents. The alarmed authorities sought to solve this problem by prescribing hard physical labour for those involved – digging and refilling trenches! It is interesting to recollect that Lord Baden-Powell prescribed an equally efficacious nostrum for testosterone-laden scouts in *Scouting for Boys* (Scouter's Edition), namely, fewer blankets on their beds and abstention from rich food.

The references to the legendary Black Jack Galleghan are ambivalent and it seems he did not get on well with the other legendary figure from the campaign, Weary Dunlop. On one occasion it was thought Galleghan reported a soldier who had incurred his displeasure to the Japanese authorities. Aspinall was assigned to a party that worked on the Burma railway and his recollections and photographs are particularly graphic. The illness, starvation and overwork are recorded.



The officers were not uniformly capable, or up to their obligations, and Aspinall reserves his highest praise for the medical officers. The work contains a number of vignettes as to how captivity penetrated the consciousness of the ordinary soldier. The first reaction to the surrender was disbelief and as living conditions became progressively difficult 'mateship' aided the survival of many prisoners. It was said that 'a sense of humour was as good as a pint of rice'.

After the Japanese surrender the married prisoners were concerned about possibility of impotence when they returned home to their wives. From time to time the prisoners were guarded by Sikhs who had changed sides and, as a consequence, regarded by the Australians as traitors.

The best known of the photographs are those taken at the Selarang Square incident where 15,400 men were forced into a limited space for several days in an effort to force them to sign an agreement to refrain from any attempt to escape. Those crowded into the square included the sick and amputees. The effect of the tropical sun was exacerbated by the lack of water and latrine facilities. Eventually, the soldiers signed under duress. During the incident Lieutenant-Colonel Galleghan was taken to the beach to witness the execution of four recaptured escapees. The firing squad comprised Indians who had also changed sides.

Aspinall took the photographs with a Kodak folding camera that his uncle had given him. He had no specific purpose in making the collection and 'thought it would be good to get the photographs back to Australia and perhaps show them to my mother or relations or anybody that was interested ... I suppose it was my photographic diary'.

For the later photographs he used X-ray film found in a store and developed the negatives with chemicals similarly acquired. Any of us who have messed up our family bathroom developing pictures will know how difficult this would be. He probably risked his life to do so. The book is printed on high quality paper to do the photographs justice. It is excellent and deserves a place on the bookshelves of all those interested in military history.

Some of the photographs have been lost as they were used in Rabaul war crimes trials. Lawyers notoriously lose interest in exhibits after they have served their purpose – here it amounts almost to historical vandalism. It is hoped that the collection is now appropriately archived and available to interested scholars. It is primary historical evidence of events during the Japanese occupation of Singapore.

JOHN TWYFORD

BOOK REVIEW

THE LOST DIGGERS

By Ross Coulthart

HarperCollins, 399pp RRP \$70.00 incl. GST

Most of the Australian reading public will now be aware of the generous gesture of Mr Kerry Stokes in the purchase of 4,000 recently discovered photographic plates in the village of Vignacourt in Northern France. Local photographers Louis and Antoinette Thuillier took the photographs of allied soldiers billeted in the locality during WWI. This remarkable archive was gifted by Mr Stokes to the Australian War Memorial for permanent display. The book reproduces a number of these images and is a window on the life of Australian diggers anticipating or having survived battle.

The plates, stored in old ammunition boxes, were discovered in an attic of an abandoned farmhouse. They only survived by luck and the identity of the persons shown in the images was unknown.

After cataloguing, cleaning and conversion to digital media the images were made the subject of a television program, and an internet search for the identity of the diggers depicted. Thus far, not all of the images have been identified and the search continues.

It is noteworthy that glass plates make for high quality photographic images (anyone familiar with the Holtermann collection is aware of this). In many respects they are superior to celluloid images. After the restorative processes it was possible to read newspapers and maps in the hands of the subjects. This aspect of the work reads like a detective story.

No doubt the book will have a place on many coffee tables and should be in every municipal and school library in Australia.

The physical size and format of the book (30cm X 30cm), no doubt dictated by the need to do justice to the photographic images, positively invites browsing. And the browser will be rewarded. This, however, is to do injustice to the work as a whole. For a number of reasons, the work merits closer study.



First, where the digger in an image has been identified, the reason for his unit's presence in Vignacourt, details of the unit's engagements and how the photograph was identified, are given.

Often the identification will come from relatives who saw the television program or the images on the internet and contacting the publisher.

The identification was supported by photographs in the possession of those relatives and some are published to give the reader an insight into how the identity was established. In addition, details of a digger's post war life are given. Sadly, many of the photographs are of diggers who did not survive the war.

Second, the photographs contain many fascinating details giving a picture of village life interrupted by war. These include military vehicles, horses, ordnance and the wooden crosses fashioned by mates marking the graves of fallen comrades in the Vignacourt Cemetery. These have since been replaced by the official war grave headstones provided by the Commonwealth.

One can see how mores have changed in the last 100 years – many of the soldiers photographed are smoking cigarettes!

When the reader looks at the pictures of the military bands one can almost hear the martial music. The author has identified features of the Australian presence that suggest a particular line of inquiry including under-age diggers, over-age diggers, the importance of sport, weddings, venereal disease and brothers serving in the same unit. These aspects are followed up in the text.

Finally, whilst the work is not strictly one of military history in the usually understood sense it is highly recommended. It is a work of remarkable social history. As indicated above, reading the text throws a great deal of light on the images and those images are profoundly moving. It is all in the faces and eyes of the soldiers. The youthful bravado of the young men setting out on an adventure and the incredible sadness of men who had seen it all not looking at the camera but staring into the middle distance.

It is all summed up by a recurring theme of the book. The relatives interviewed all said that fathers, grandfathers, husbands or brothers, when they returned, were reluctant to talk about their war experiences. The images of those soldiers who could be identified are given in the index.

JOHN TWYFORD



Source: *The Lost Diggers*

FROM THE PUBLISHER

As mentioned elsewhere in *Reconnaissance* the attendance at our first monthly meeting for the year was excellent with over 50 in attendance. This is the best attendance the Society has had and it is hoped that this level will be maintained. Every effort will be made to procure interesting well-qualified speakers for the meetings.

Members will see that in this issue of *Reconnaissance* we have three book reviews. It is intended to make book reviews something of a feature of the publication and since there is so much literature being published on the topic of military history it is hoped that we can provide a guide for the discerning reader. As has been observed before this literature falls into two categories, namely, the scholarly treatments of aspects of military history and other works that might be more accurately described as 'ripping yarns'.

Your publisher is not being precious about this as there is a place for both. Our intention is let readers know how books fit into the canon. Two of the books reviewed this issue were available as a result of the kindness of Father Christmas. We would like other of our members to write reviews and if you have recently read a book that you think would be of some interest please send us your review. We think the format we are presently using provides a good template for reviews. Equally, we would be pleased to receive your suggestions as to books we might review. We intend to canvass publishers for review material.

This issue includes two very interesting pieces on family military history. We are now looking for more contributions. The word 'family' is loosely interpreted and all that is required is material that you are familiar with. Any member who would like to write a more substantial article on a scholarly topic is also very welcome to submit it. If this happens we would overlook the restriction on the size of *Reconnaissance* and if required arrange for peer review.

Again, I draw our members' attention the web site Western Front Association. Membership of the Association is free and it is possible to join online at: <www.westernfrontassociation.com>

In this issue of the Association's newsletter there are articles on WWI generals. One of those discussed is Brigadier-General AM Asquith. His rise in the service was meteoric from Temporary Sub-Lieutenant in the Royal Naval Division in 1914 to Brigadier-General toward the end of the war when he was retired after losing a leg. At the time, his father, HH Asquith, was Prime Minister of England. It is not suggested that nepotism was involved. The Asquiths were one of the most talented families in England. HH Asquith was said to be the only intellectual ever to become Prime Minister of England. He was a classics scholar at Oxford. One of Brigadier-General Asquith's brothers became a Law Lord and the other the famous film director Anthony Asquith. Another brother Raymond was killed at the Somme in 1916.

His stepmother Margot Asquith was a famous wit. She said of Lord Kitchener: 'if Kitchener was not a great man, he was, at least, a great poster'.

Dr Kevin Smith has advised that the February edition of his newsletter is now available. The publication may be obtained by contacting Kevin at the following address: helkev@tpg.co.au

JOHN TWYFORD