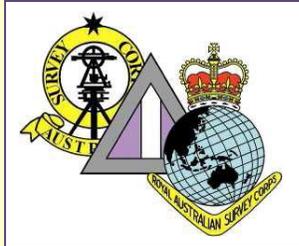


Royal Australian Survey Corps Association



ACT Newsletter

IN THIS ISSUE

Issue Note	1
2009 Calendar	2
A National RASvy Association	2
RASvy Corps Nominal Roll.....	3
Personalia.....	4
Tall Tales & True	4
A Visit to Battlefields of the WW1 Western Front.....	5
Notices	8
Vale	8
Photo Gallery.....	9

Issue Note

By Rob McHenry

Welcome to the first and hopefully not the last issue of the Royal Australian Survey Corps Association, ACT Newsletter. When I first thought of producing an ACT newsletter, I was unsure of the amount of interest there would be in such a venture amongst ex-Corps members on the Canberra mailing list. I have been pleasantly surprised by the response and have thus decided to produce Issue 1/09 sooner than initially planned. However, I expect the norm will be to produce two issues per year; one probably after the Corps birthday and the other at the end of the year. By producing this issue, I hope to generate more interest and thus continue to receive significant and varied input from as many members as possible. I also seek your comments, advice and input on the newsletter format itself. This publication can only be as good or interesting as the input made available by you so I am happy to receive your input at any time (email: rob@mchenry.net.au). I also take this opportunity to thank those who have contributed to this issue.

2009 Calendar

Anzac Day March and Lunch	25 April 09
Corps Birthday Lunch	1 July 09
Remembrance Day Dinner	11 November 09
2009 SNAGA Golf Competition	TBA

A National RASvy Association

By Rob McHenry

For some years now it appears that there has been discussion about the desirability of forming a National RASvy Association. To this effect, a meeting was held in Bendigo on 7 September last year between delegates from each state. This coincided with the “Farewell Fortuna” event. Bob Skitch acted as chairperson and tabled the following points:

1. Should it proceed and in order for it to start - a firm commitment must be made by each of the State/unit Associations.
2. The RA Survey Corps Associations are not going to last forever. Eventually we all fall off our perch or become too old or too few to care and the structure collapses.
3. Some of the WW2 unit associations have already done so - I am aware of the 2/1st folding its tent a couple of years ago. Others are close to it.
4. The Ex-Servicemen’s Association of NSW being largely WW2 oriented came close to it. It has been rescued by Richard Jackson-Hope and a few others in creating a phoenix association - the RA Survey Corps Association of NSW. Queensland went through a similar process about fifteen years ago.
5. A National Association would undoubtedly give our Associations greater strength both in presenting issues of concern and interest to government (perhaps) but more in maintaining the esprit de corps of the whole.
6. A National Association would NOT take over the State Associations.
7. Associations; members would join and belong to their individual State/unit associations and in effect in so doing become members of the National Association. There may need to be an additional national or federal capitation fee on top of each State’s annual subscription.
8. The National Association must be incorporated to exist.

There was more discussion about the issue that is covered in the December 2008 Issue 37 of the QLD Newsletter and more complete minutes of the Fortuna meeting can be provided to any member who may wish to peruse them.

After reviewing the minutes and considering the proposal, I provided the following ACT position:

- The ACT ex-RASvy Corps Association is an informal association of approximately 65 people with the common bond of being ex-RASvy. There are no fees. This arrangement works well considering the general level of interest and there appears no need to formalise and incorporate.
- The need for each state association to be incorporated is not understood but this is something for each state association to decide on.
- The need for an incorporated national level organisation is not understood.
- An elected national level spokesperson (Chairman/President) to represent all ex-RASvy Corps Association members when the need arises is considered desirable - such as an ex Corps Director in Bendigo for example.
- It is accepted that the ex-RASvy Corps Association membership will thin and cease to exist over time as members die. The concept of changing names or making the existing association something else is not understood as it is considered to defeat the purpose of having an ex-RASvy Corps Association.
- The concept of sponsorship needs further discussion.

The above response is very much my personal opinion. I believe some may be confusing national communication, coordination and cooperation with the need for a formalised, incorporated national body. We already have a national association, albeit divided between the states and unit (Army Svy Regt). It is up to us to communicate effectively. Email can make an enormous difference as it provides a cheap and efficient method of national information dissemination. We should use it more.

Noting all of the above, I am happy to receive your feedback on this issue.

RASvy Corps Nominal Roll

By Peter Jensen

With a view to contribute something to the celebration of the Corps centenary in 2015, I have committed to compiling a Corps Nominal Roll to be finished before that occasion. Elements of the roll are: regimental number (some members had three), rank on discharge, surname, initials, honours and award, dates of Corps service. The distinct periods, or forms of Service, of; before World War I, World War 1, between the wars, World War II, the interim Army, the Regular Army, National Service, the Reserve and WRAAC who served with the Corps, Corps and Service transfers all present different challenges. I started in late-2007 with gratefully received inputs from other Corps Associations who provided unit rolls in electronic form as a starter. 2008 was a busy year for me doing other things, but completion six years from now seems achievable. I know that I will miss some names and get some detail wrong, but being

an old surveyor who often battled with error budgets, perhaps two standard deviations (about 95% from memory) will be acceptable.

Personalia.....

This is an area for any information you may wish to share with the rest of us regarding moves, holidays, or anything else you can think of that may be of general interest to fellow RASvy types.

Tall Tales & True

A couple of gems by John Bullen

A couple of memories of Keith Barber which may not be generally known, deserve a wider audience.

One incredible episode of Fortuna's history is the saga of the night-time poultry thieving raids led by Captain C E B Stewart amongst Bendigo backyard chook runs in the late 1940s. Teddy Stewart was apt to appear without warning in the Fortuna Tavern or anywhere else where he could conscript his team. He'd grab anyone who hadn't fled on sight and order them to come with him immediately - and that's an order!

He would then lead his team on a raid of neighbouring chook yards. Chook raid veterans included Jack Owen (Medical Corps), Jack Gore and Keith Barber. As those who've tried it well know, it is impossible to steal chooks quietly. With chook yards in utter pandemonium, every dog in the neighbourhood barking hysterically, house lights going on and doors flying open, the raiders would be frantically trying to clamber over back fences, sorely hampered by flapping, squawking chooks under the arm.

This led to at least one counter-raid on Fortuna by the Bendigo police. The culprits strenuously denied everything and honour was thereby saved. Fortunately, during the interrogation the police did not recognise the dripping sound behind a closed door as being blood from chook corpses freshly hung up to drain. Equally fortunately, no tell-tale blood flowed out from beneath the door. Keith Barber and Jack Gore both claimed afterwards to have been sweating blood, though, as they listened to the steady drip onto the concrete just behind them.

Teddy Stewart was a renowned eccentric who was later promoted to major and posted to Victoria Barracks, Melbourne. It was in that posting that he suicided with a pistol in the 1950s.

I first learnt of the chook raids from Jack Owen in the mid-1950s and it was all confirmed by Jack Gore in the 1960s. Jack Owen had a second stint at Fortuna in the 1970s as the RAP NCO.

My second memory is of an event in 1972 when I'd just taken over from Keith Todd as OC Carto Sqn at Fortuna. Keith Barber was SSM Carto Sqn at the time. A week or two later, the SSM entered my office.

“It’s Private Wotsit’s birthday sir, and I thought I’d check your policy.”

“Policy? A policy on birthdays?” I said, quite baffled, and stalling for time.

*“Yessir. When Major Todd took over from Major Ricketts, I did the usual and marched Private Oojum into the OC’s office, announcing that it was her birthday. Major Todd looked up and said ‘So?’ So I explained ‘Well, Major Ricketts used to give all the girls a big kiss on their birthdays.’ Major Todd exploded, and yelled ‘He **WHAT!!**’ Private Oojum burst into tears. Major Todd bawled ‘Get that bloody woman out of my office!’ Private Oojum became hysterical, and really sir, it was all terribly difficult. So this time I thought I’d play safe and check out the OC’s policy first before marching Private Wotsit in.”*

“Thank you SSM. I don’t see any need to change Major Todd’s policy.”

A Visit to Battlefields of the WW1 Western Front

By Peter Jensen



In the middle of last year Jenny and I were fortunate to visit some of the World War I battlefields and cemeteries in France and Belgium, as part of a holiday to Europe and Scandinavia. It was not an escorted tour of the battlefields, as we had particular places to visit with family and friend connections and we wanted to spend time in those places. We collected a rental car at Amiens and first stop was the small town Villers-Brettonneux, only a few kilometers to the east. There we parked in Rue de Melbourne and

walked along Rue Victoria, to the town school which was donated by the children of Victoria after the war. There is the shelter-shed in the quadrangle with the very large permanent banner ‘DO NOT FORGET AUSTRALIA’ in green and gold. At that time it was school recess and the kids wanted to shake our hands. Many student projects about Australian history, flags, birds and animals were on display in the windows.

A couple of kilometers north of the town, on a ridge overlooking the Somme River, is the Villers-Brettonneux Australian War Memorial and Commonwealth War Cemetery. This is the national memorial on the Western Front and it also commemorates the



11,000 Australian soldiers with no known grave and who are not commemorated in other places in France or Belgium. There we looked for and found the name of Rob McHenry's great-uncle Lance-Sergeant RJ McHenry, 23rd Infantry Battalion, killed in action at Pozieres. It so happens that his name has pride of place next to the entrance to the memorial tower. One witness to the Red Cross inquiry into him being reported missing, said 'McHenry was the gamest Sergt we had'. It was a sunny day with a few clouds and from the tower the key landmarks of the area were clearly visible across the rolling hills of a patchwork of wheatfields and occasional woods. You could see Amiens to the west (the main German objective before Paris), Villers-Brettoneux to the south, two kilometers to the north the Somme River meandering its way to the west and villages of Corbie and Hamel only a few kilometers away near the river. The memorial was unveiled in 1938 and badly damaged in a 1944 strafing attack by the German Luftwaffe when they believed that allied forces were using the tower as an artillery observation post. Of course the memorial has been repaired but the repair of the tower did leave some large stone chip damage as a reminder.



From there we found our way through French villages and towns with familiar names related to battles in the Somme area, and north through Albert, Arras, Aubers, Fromelles and in to the Flanders area of Belgium and our destination there of Ypres (or Ieper). Wild Flanders poppies grew on the roadsides in France. On the way we visited war cemeteries with family connections at Cabaret Rouge near Souchez and VC Corner near Fromelles in France. At Fromelles we saw that the work of the exploratory dig for the graves at Pheasant Wood was just complete and that a memorial service had been held a few days before.

All of these cemeteries are sad and solemn places but are peaceful and beautifully maintained by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission. The lawns of the cemeteries are as good as a golf green and the gardens of roses and other small flowering plants in the rows of headstones are perfectly groomed. There are no weeds. All cemeteries have a large sandstone or limestone Cross of Sacrifice, those with more than 1000 graves have a Stone of Remembrance and some have a grand stone entrance. A register of graves and names is also kept and each cemetery or memorial has a guest book for personal comments.

Ypres (or Ieper) is the site of Menin Gate memorial where there are the names of more than 54,000 Commonwealth soldiers who died in the Ypres battles and who have no known grave. Menin Gate was destroyed in the war but most Australian soldiers who went on to the battles of Menin Road, Polygon Wood and Passchendaele passed through the eastern gate of the city on their way to the front. Two large stone lions from atop the destroyed gate were donated by Belgium to Australia and are in the entrance to the Australian War Memorial, Canberra. Every night at 8pm traffic is stopped and there is a short service held within the Gate. Buglers from the local fire brigade play the last post and have done so every night since 1928. Many people attend the service and on the two nights that we were there, there were more than 1000 standing within the Gate. Near Passchendaele, not far north-east of Ypres, at Tyne Cot there is the largest Commonwealth War Cemetery in the world with 12,000 graves and the names of 35,000 soldiers with no known grave.

On Menin Gate we found the name of Jenny's great-uncle of the 5th Infantry Battalion. His is an interesting case, but not uncommon. From the Australian War Memorial and National Archives internet webpages, I have found records that he and 31 of his fellow soldiers of the battalion who were killed on the same day, were buried together in a battlefield burial. They are all commemorated on Menin Gate. They include two brothers killed by the same shell when one was carrying his wounded brother to a dressing station. Records also show that



Wild Flanders poppies on the roadsides in France.

another 21 of the battalion were buried together 700 yards away on the same day. Brigade war diaries, also on-line on the internet from the War Memorial, include operation orders, maps and intelligence, and from all this, and GoogleEarth, we were able to visit the exact burial location as it was recorded on their personal records. Surprisingly we found that a German built bunker at that location, which was found again only a few years ago, is now open for tourists as arranged through the Memorial Museum Passchendaele. I am now

endeavouring to find out what happened to these mass graves after the war as all of the soldiers are commemorated with no known grave.

The operational mapping and terrain analysis for these battles is now available on the internet and is interesting in its own right. It perhaps warrants a story for another day. After the Flanders part of Belgium we 'bicycled and barged' our way from Amsterdam to Brussels, visited Jensen country in Denmark then found our way to 600 miles from the North Pole on an expedition tour on a Russian research ship around Svalbard north of Norway.

Notices

This area is for general RASvy Corps notices that may also be found in other state newsletters.

ROYAL AUSTRALIAN SURVEY CORPS PLAQUE:

The Ex-Fortuna Association has purchased some of the original RASvy plaques. These are available from Ex-Fortuna Secretary Tracey Phillips, 03 5449 6330 (AH);
Email: phipsys@tpg.com.au
Price on application.

RA SURVEY ASSOCIATION PLAQUE:

Magna Carto advises that the plaque has been finished and is ready for distribution. The final design incorporates the three badges overlapping, the theodolite badge of pre-WW2, the wartime colour patch and the Post WW2 RASvy badge. The cost of the plaque is \$50.00 plus postage. Contact Ex-Fortuna Secretary Tracey Phillips, 03 5449 6330 (AH);
Email: phipsys@tpg.com.au

Vale

JOHN HOGAN

Gary Warnest of the ExFortuna Survey Association has advised of the sudden passing of John Hogan who died peacefully in his sleep on the night of 11 Feb 09. John was a well known long serving RASvy WO1 and RSM of the Survey Regiment.

KEITH BARBER

By John Bullen

Keith Barber, Warrant Officer, First Class, died on 21 January 2009 aged almost 87. Born on 18 February 1922 at Queenscliff, he was educated at Queenscliff and the Gordon Institute of Technology, Geelong. VP 6873 K J BARBER enlisted in the permanent Military Forces RAE on 7 Mar 40. He served during World War Two in the NG Survey Section. In Dec 42/Jan43 he was part of the UC Gerry Owers and Sgt Jim Miller party tasked with completing a Compass and chain traverse across NG, starting at Abau Is over the Owen Stanley Range to Safia. An extremely arduous task. He served in Wau in 1943 and finally retired on 31 July 1974.

On less formal occasions he was known as Acky or Achi. No one knew how to spell it, though we all knew how to pronounce it. But where did it come from? My best guess (and I would welcome more reliable advice) is that it came from the well known Achi Baba (pronounced Acky Barber by the Anzacs) on the Gallipoli peninsula, and of course there were many Anzacs still around only 25 years later when Keith joined up.

As School Sergeant-Major at the School of Military Survey in the late 1960s, and as Squadron Sergeant-Major of the Cartographic Squadron at the Army Survey Regiment, he had direct personal contact with a very large number of Survey Corps soldiers, each of whom will have their own personal memories of him. Some no doubt will be particularly colourful, especially any memories of the Mess President's not so skilful employment of the time honoured football sock in the neutering of the Sergeants Mess cat at Bonegilla.

Photo Gallery

This area is for photos that may be of interest, old and new, related to RASvy Corps activities.

8 Field Survey Squadron – Popondetta, PNG.



Unit members started arriving in early 1972 but the building to house the squadron wasn't ready. Thus, the local YCW Hall became the temporary home of 8 Fd Svy Sqn, Popondetta, PNG.

The new, purpose built building. B8s in the tropics with dodgy airconditioning proved interesting.



Alex Laing was the original OC of the Sqn. He revisited the site in 1996.