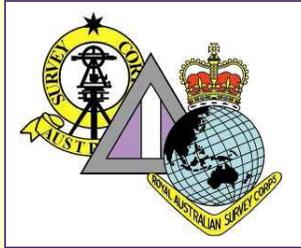


Royal Australian Survey Corps Association



ACT Newsletter

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Issue Note

By Rob McHenry

The end of another year draws near and the newsletter input is pretty thin. However, Don Swiney has provided another good yarn and Dawn Laing has made a request on behalf of the Defence Widows Support Group in the ACT. Their idea is to produce and publish a collection of short stories from wives, partners and widows of ex-service personnel. I'm sure there are many long-suffering people out there who have had to endure many tall tales and true from their serving partners. Dawn is now offering them an opportunity to have their say.

As this will be the last newsletter for 2012, I would like to thank all those who have made contributions and wish all ex-RASvy Corps members and their families a merry Christmas and a healthy, happy and prosperous new year.

Tall Tales & True

Ballad of Running Bear

By Don Swiney

I took over 2 Field Survey Squadron in December 1975 from Major Ted Laker. Ted briefed me on each of the members of the squadron but I do not remember that he told me anything specific about Sapper Jamie Lyle. Jamie at that stage probably hadn't been in the squadron long enough to make his mark. His claim to fame at that stage was the producer of the untidiest compilation sheet that had come out of the compilation room but as he rightly said, he had his compilation sheet much longer than any one else so of course it was scruffy. I also remember using Jamie as a driver for the staff car a couple of times but he drove it like a truck and I told him that I would be just as happy if he didn't drive me again. I was distracted somewhat by the preparation for Operation Cenderawasih. It was to commence in April and then May and finally got under way in July. The delay enabled us to get a vacancy on the short Indonesian language course at the RAAF School of Languages at Point Cook. Jamie volunteered and on Stan Campbell's recommendation he was sent. Whether Jamie knew it or not, he certainly knew it by the end of the course, Jamie had a natural ability with languages and passed out with a glowing assessment.

The operation got under way and we started by covering that Western area of Irian Jaya generally referred to as the 'Bird's Head' or the Vogelkop Peninsula. Jamie was a member of a party that was establishing a control station about midway along the Northern coast which happened to be at a Catholic Mission. The people there were battling an outbreak of polio and the missionary was desperate to get some hundreds of doses of vaccine. He had tried to get it through his own system but the vaccine had been diverted as it came through customs. My first knowledge of the situation was when I was called to the radio to speak to Sapper Lyle. Jamie outlined the situation and as I listened I was wondering what part I was expected to play in all this. Then Jamie said "...and I have told them, Sir, that you will get the vaccine". Thanks a lot, Jamie, I had already been warned by both the Australian Embassy in Jakarta and by Army Office not to get involved in any Aide to the Civil Power situations so I knew well what response I would get if I was to send a 'copy to all' signal'. I went to bed that night with it foremost in my mind and sometime during the night I remembered that the Senior Chaplain at Field Force Command was Catholic, so early next morning I sent a signal to him alone advising him of the situation. With the 'buck' safely passed I relaxed, not thinking for a minute that he would be able to break through the bureaucracy to get the vaccine. I had underestimated the power of the Catholic Church and next there was a flurry of signals, the vaccine was acquired from the Commonwealth Serum Laboratories and using the pilot to pilot transfer system on the civilian airlines it was in Darwin in time to catch that fortnight's Hercules. We had the porter waiting for it when it arrived and flew the serum straight to Manokwari where it was passed directly to the Catholic Mission there which no doubt immediately sent it on. Job done, I thought but then I got two 'nastigrams', one from the Australian Embassy in Jakarta and the other from Army Office both reminding me that I was to avoid all such activity and demanding an explanation. They were cancelled out by an 'attaboy' from Chief of Staff Field Force Command (obviously generated by the Senior Chaplain) congratulating me on my action.

Towards the end of that year's operation, and we were planning for the next year. We sent a RAAF Iroquois helicopter South of the Jaya Wijaya mountains and pretty well directly South of Biak to look for two airfields of which we had heard from the missionaries and to check them out for Caribou use. In addition to the crew were Sergeant Peter Jensen, Sapper Jamie Lyle and an Indonesian Army surveyor. On the return trip they found that their passage was blocked by clouds so taking the sensible course they decided to land where they could and continue back the next day. They called us up on the flight following net and advised us back at Biak as to what they were doing. We acknowledged and shut down the flight following net. The next morning they turned up as expected and the aircraft captain, Flying Officer John Evans, sought me out. He related to me the situation of the previous night. They landed on the side of a river and settled down for the night with all six people finding a spot in the helicopter to snooze after a dinner of combat rations eaten cold as rain set-in and then continued unabated after nightfall. Using the aircraft spotlight, for only a few seconds at a time so as not to flatten the aircraft battery and not be able to start the engine, they found that they were now on an island that was rapidly getting smaller. Visibility in the black night and pouring rain was only a few metres and by about midnight the water was nearly at the aircraft's skids. The situation was then desperate and the only option to save the aircraft, and perhaps the crew, appeared to be to fly/taxi to higher ground across the river. Before trying that, a suitable landing point had to be found. Flying Officer Evans and Sergeant Jensen donned life vests and being tied to a rope anchored to the helicopter, then set off across the challenging current of the flooded river not being able to see much. John Evans had a leg injured in a helicopter crash on 8th Field Survey Squadron operations in east New Britain in 1973 and this soon affected the attempt with the two washed off their feet but luckily still attached to the rope. Both were wet, cold and exhausted and Jamie then volunteered to try and cross without a rope adding to the drag. With a life vest, torch and a machete he managed to make it to the river bank where he was able to clear an area large enough for the aircraft to land and then signalled for them to ground taxi across. The helicopter had to land 'on top' of Jamie who shone his torch on the nearest and biggest trees, amidst the debris sucked up by the rotor disc. Luckily the helicopter settled solidly with about a foot of the skids, and the tail boom, still hanging over the river bank. The Indonesian soldier had slept through most of this in the quarter compartment and woke with eyes like 'coke bottles' with the start-up whirring of the turbine engine and Peter Jensen telling him to put a life-vest on. The noise of the Iroquois in the middle of the night must have spooked the locals for many miles up and down the valley.

The aircraft captain was adamant that with out Jamie's action, they may not have survived.

I wrote up the citation for a 'bravery medal' but in the event it was downgrade to a 'CGS's Commendation'. The operation ended and it was nearly December when Jamie asked for permission to stay on in Indonesia for his leave. I couldn't see a problem as Jamie's now very accomplished language skills would get him out of any problems. I approved but checked with Field Force Command who agreed with me. Survey Directorate didn't and sent me a signal demanding that I ensure that he returned with everyone else. Too bad, too late, Jamie had already gone. He caught an inter island ship from Biak to Sulawesi, travelled the length of that island by what ever means he could and conned his way on board an Indonesian Air Force C130 to Bali. He then travelled through Java however he could and ended up at Bandung to meet up with all his mates from Jantop. He then managed to hitch a lift with a RAAF C130 that was passing through Jakarta to get him home.

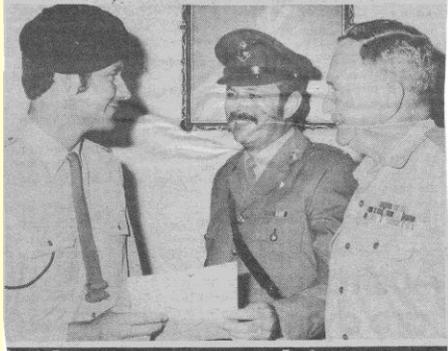
As far as the citation was concerned, these things take time and I thought no more of it and it wasn't until the following year and back at Randwick that I got a call from the Command Sergeant Major. The General wanted to see Jamie and I that morning. I protested that I didn't have time to ensure Jamie was reasonably turned out but I was overruled. Bill Harvey was the SSM and I had some 'getting back' on Jamie so I told Bill to get him tidied up, not tell him what it was about but to tell him he was driving me into Victoria Barracks. It was Jamie's turn to protest as he rightly claimed, I had already agreed he was not to drive me anywhere. We drove into Victoria Barracks with Jamie a bit bemused, made more so because I was attired in service dress and Sam Browne. When we arrived, Jamie was about to head off to the canteen until I told him that he was coming with me. He followed me up to the second floor and finally to the General's outer office. As we came in the Command Sergeant Major looked him up and down and then to me "is that the best you could do, Sir", "fraid so, RSM" from me and we followed him into the General's office. The GOC FF Comd at the time was Major General Mark Bradbury and a real gentleman. He came around the side of his desk, shook Jamie's hand, sat us down at his coffee table poured the coffee and presented him with the CGS's citation. Jamie up until this point was very apprehensive not knowing what it was all about. When the realization hit him, he relaxed, leaned back in the chair and chatted away to the General like he was an old mate. Photos taken and at a sign from the RSM, we made our departure but as we did Jamie reached down to grab the commendation to fold and put in his pocket. Quick as a flash, the RSM extracted from under his hand and gave it to me. "Look after this please, Sir" he said giving it to me. The next time Jamie saw it, it was in a frame. The word had spread around the unit and Jamie was henceforth known as 'Running Bear'. For those of you who have forgotten, the song went:

CGS Commendation for Survey Sapper's action

★ **BELOW:** Spr. Jamie Lyle, of 2nd Field Survey Squadron, is congratulated by his OC, Maj. Donald Swiney, centre, and the General Officer Commanding, Field Force Command, Maj.-Gen. Mark Bradbury, after receiving a Commendation from the Chief of the General Staff, Lt.-Gen. D. B. Dunstan.

Spr. Lyle received the Commendation for his actions following a helicopter forced landing in Irian Jaya.

He ignored all hazards, swam a raging river, located and cleared a suitable landing zone and guided by torch the helicopter and crew to safety.



On the bank of the river stood Running Bear, young Indian brave

On the other side of the river stood his lovely Indian maid

Little White Dove was her name, such a lovely sight to see

But their tribes fought with each other, so their love could never be

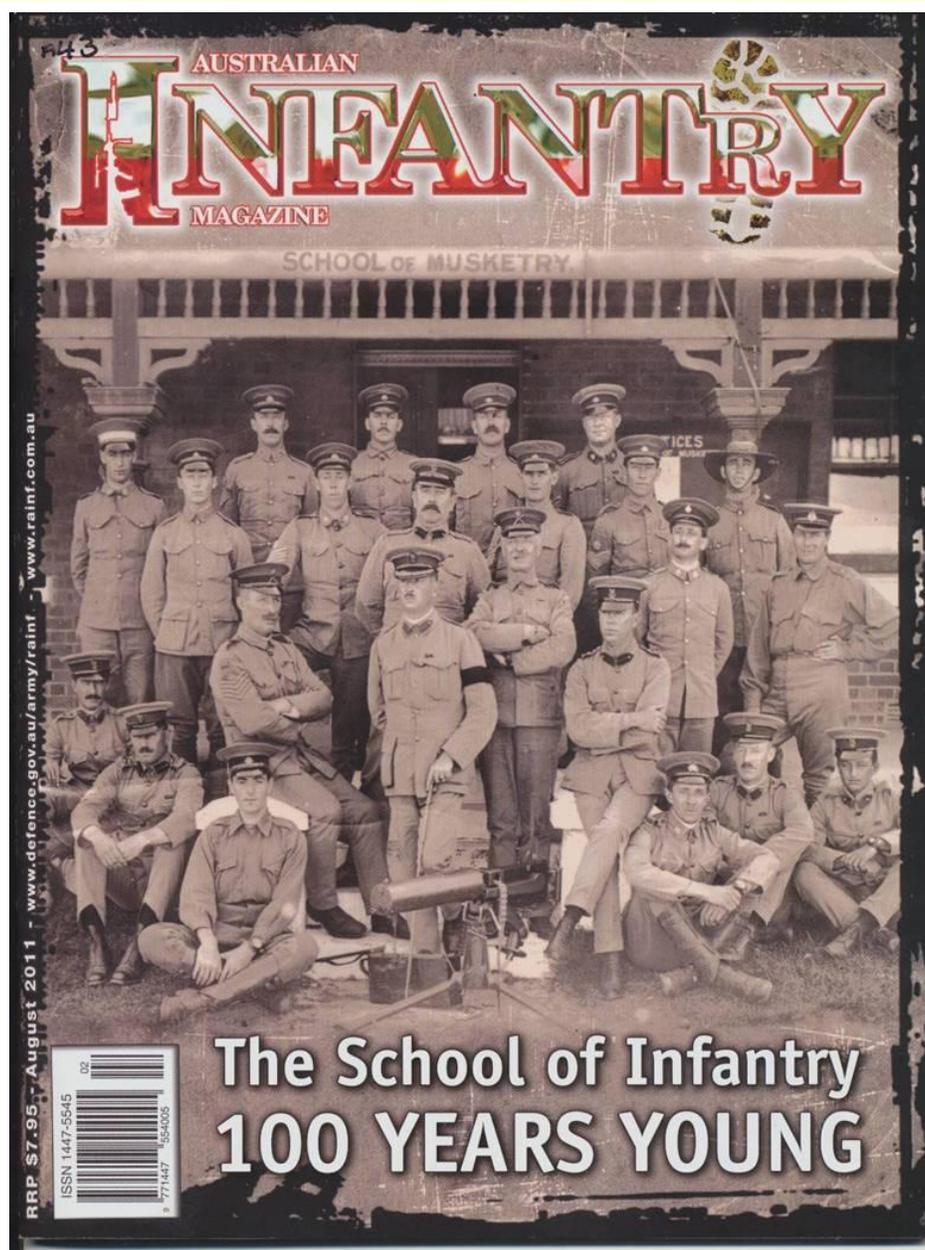
After my time, Jamie applied to join the SASR. He attended the first cadre course but withdrew because of injury, he attended the second through to completion but the SASR, for their own reasons, chose not to take him. Too bad SASR, you missed out on a very good albeit unique soldier. On reflection, what Jamie did was, in my opinion very brave. Had he got washed away, the chances of finding him were slim to say the least. Had he

not done what he did, all his companions could have lost their lives. Jamie was no fool, he knew what he was doing and the possible consequences but he still choose to do it I wrote the citation and I had asked that he be awarded a 'bravery medal' but it was not to be.

2 Fd Svy Sqn Headquarters Building?

Don Swiney forwarded a copy of the latest Australian Infantry Magazine (AUG 11) which provides a record of the School of Infantry over the last 100 years and a good read on their history in Australia. On the front of the magazine is a very old picture of a group of soldiers posing for a photo in front of a building with a reasonably ornate veranda.

Ever the eagle eye, Don asked whether the old building in the background was 2 Field Survey Sqn HQ. Peter Raue immediately confirmed that it was and that it was originally the School of Musketry.



Wives, Partners, Widows. Do you have a story to tell?

From Dawn Laing

2011 marked the 30th anniversary of the establishment of the Defence Widows Support Group in the ACT. To celebrate we decided to make a collection of the stories of wives, partners and widows of ex-service personnel. Stories can be as short as one paragraph or as long as 1000 words. They can be funny, sad, just interesting or factual. You can type it or write it by hand, email or post it or you can let us know that you would like to have your story recorded orally. **Just remember that it is the story that we are interested in and not how you write it.** If changes need to be made for publication, one of our volunteer editors will suggest changes and return the edited version to you for approval. You can indicate if you wish to be anonymous in the publication. All the material collected will also be deposited in an institution such as the National Library for research into this aspect of social history that, we believe, has been sadly neglected. We are also accepting stories written by husbands, provided they are about the domestic side of military life.

Here is a short story to which many of you can relate I'm sure:

During the late 1960's, a posting to a large Naval Training establishment in Southern Victoria came with a very nice older-style brick "marked" house within the married quarters. My husband was told that, according to his rank, we were entitled to have carpet covering only two thirds of the floors in the bedrooms and living area. This left a strip of bare boards around the carpeted area, in those days a bit of a nuisance to polish and keep clean. My husband's request to have our one third of bare board under the beds and the lounge suite was treated with less than sympathy!

SOME IDEAS TO GET YOU STARTED

How I met my husband/partner.	First impressions of military life.
Life in a married quarter.	Coping on overseas postings.
Having servants.	When husbands/partners are away.
Removals.	Making ends meet.
Entertaining/entertainment.	The kids.
The female network.	Support offered by others.
Coping with a traumatic event.	When your husband/partner was at War.
When both partners were serving.	Communication before e-mail and mobile phones.
Hostility in the general community.	How your husband/partner's career affected you.
Domestic side of a significant event (eg Cyclone Tracey or the Melbourne/Voyager disaster).	
When a husband/partner returned changed by the experience of their service.	

For more information or to send a story (or stories) please contact:

Dawn Laing dlaing@bigpond.com

Postal: 16/5 Tauss Place, BRUCE ACT 2617

Phone: 02 6253 0803

Please provide your full name, email address and/or postal address so that I can contact you.

Vale

FRANK COHEN

From Brian Mead

Brian Mead has advised that Frank Cohen passed away on Wed 7th September 2011. Frank was a long term Member of our Association/s - 4 Fd Svy Coy Old Comrades and RA Svy Corps Association (WA). During WW2 Frank served with 4 Fd Svy Coy in WA. Later in 1948 he joined the ARA - serving with RA Svy Corps as a Topographic Surveyor.

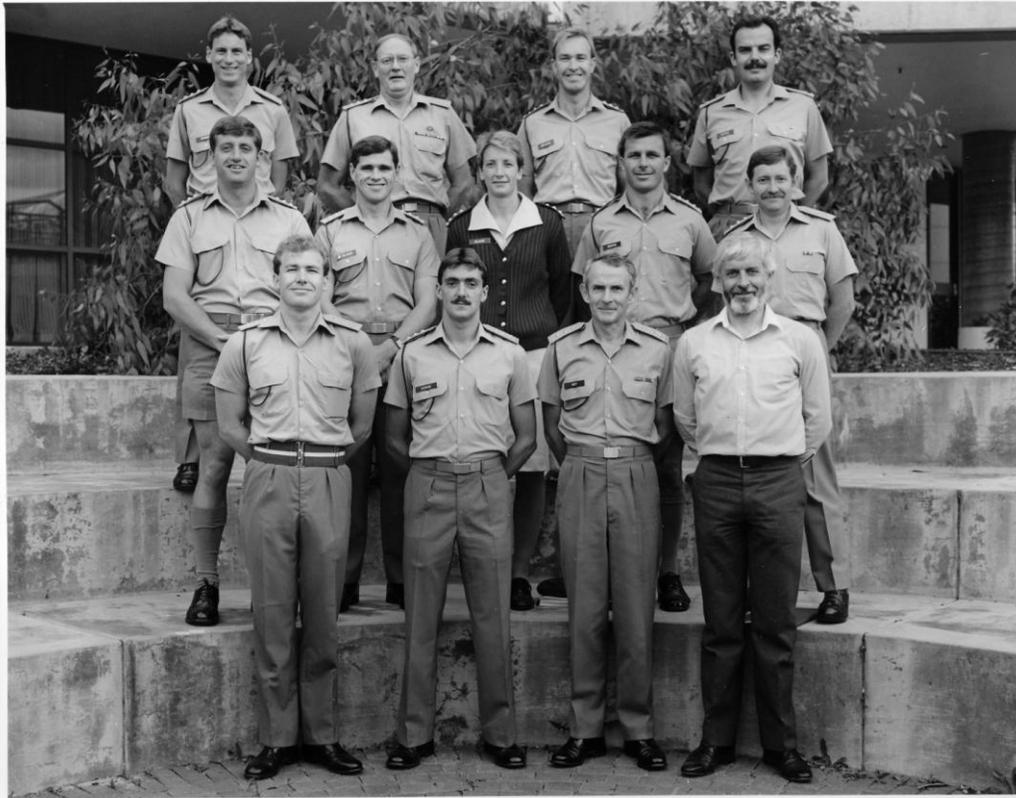
PAUL LEGGE-WILKINSON

From Charlie Watson

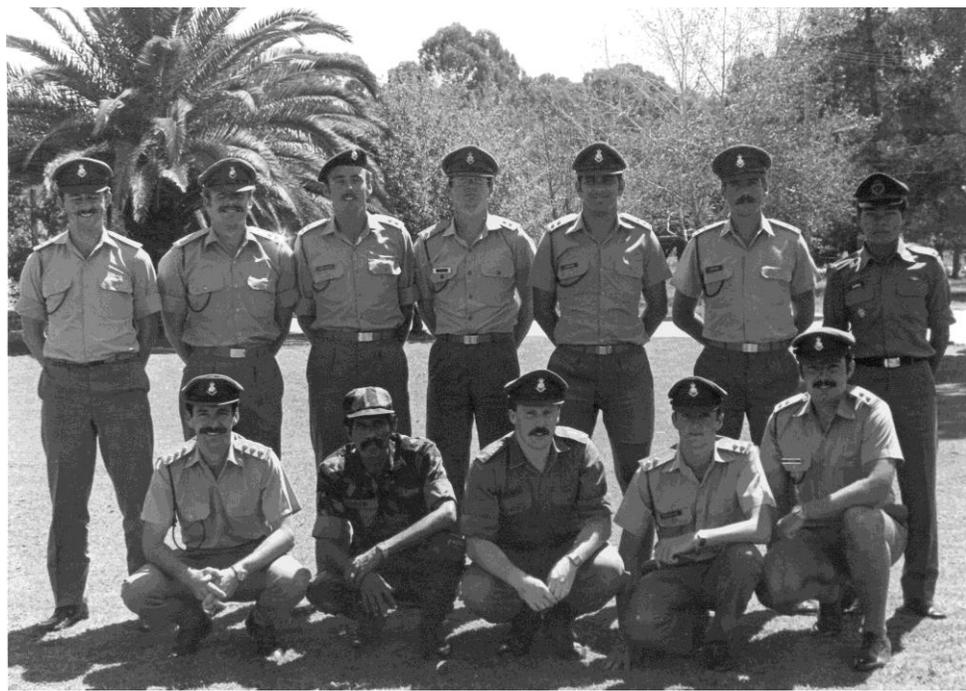
Paul Legge-Wilkinson passed away on 28th October 2011 at the age of 84. Paul served as a LT in RASVY in the early 1950's. He was on one of the ship to shore triangulation operations in New Ireland with Spencer Snow, Clem Sargent and many others. He later joined the Dept of Interior in Canberra as a licensed Surveyor. He is survived by his wife Beryl and their six children.

Photo Gallery

Photos, old and new, related to RASvy Corps activities.



1/87
ROAC



1/81 ROBC



1/84 ROBC