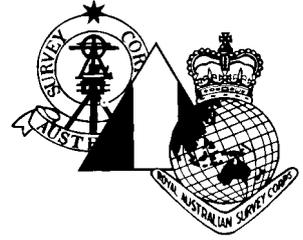


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ROYAL AUSTRALIAN SURVEY CORPS  
ASSOCIATION  
Queensland Branch



## BULLETIN

CHRISTMAS EDITION

DECEMBER 2002

### DON'T FORGET!! –

#### MAPMAKERS OF FORTUNA – the History of the Army Survey Regiment

*The History of the Army Survey Regiment will be launched on the 3<sup>rd</sup> weekend in March 2003, that is, Friday 21<sup>st</sup> March, at a civic reception in the newly restored Bendigo Town Hall commencing at 1700 hrs followed by a dinner at the Havilah Rd RSL. A luncheon BBQ will follow on the Saturday at the Eaglehawk RSL. There may be other activities and the next issue of Magna Carto will contain full details with nomination forms.*

*The History will be in A4 format, about 15mm thick with hard cover and contain 17 plates of maps and many photos. 1000 copies are being printed at a Maryborough printer and the cost is likely to be about \$50.00 a copy.*

### PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

At a time when our nation is going through the worst drought on record, horrendous bush fires threatening life and property along with talk of war and terrorism, it is difficult to bring a peaceful message for the coming season.

However, twenty centuries ago a child was born in Bethlehem who set before us God's programme for this world. Christmas is the time when the message that could bring peace first entered the world.

As you celebrate that message of love and peace with your families, spare a thought for those members of the Australian Defence Force who have followed you in the service of their nation; those who cannot be with their families this Christmas because they are "on duty" away from home.

May the spirit of Christmas fill your hearts at this time, and in the year ahead, with peace.

**Peter Bates-Brownsword**

### NOTICES

#### VALE – Phil Meagher

Gary Warnest advises that Phil Meagher lost his battle with cancer on Saturday morning 7 Dec 02. Phil and Ronny (nee Finlay) married in November 2002. He had a hard battle over the last 4 months and is now at peace. Another one of our number gone too early.

Phil was the RSM of the Army Survey Regiment from 1992 to 1994.

The funeral was at the Mulqueen Chapel Bridge Street Bendigo on Tuesday 10 Dec 02 at 1400hrs followed by a wake at the Eaglehawk Cricket Clubrooms next to the Eaglehawk oval.

#### PNG MEDAL

President Peter is continuing to investigate this matter on behalf of all State Survey Associations. Peter has had fruitful talks with Christies in Sydney that may circumvent the need for specific authority to be obtained from the PNG Government. Some unit associations with WW2 service in PNG have already indicated interest. So those who are contemplating having their medals remounted after the plethora of medal issues since they were discharged and have a mind to apply – hold off for a moment until we resolve this matter.

## COMMITTEE

**Patron Lieutenant Colonel EU Anderson MBE** (Ph 3408 9179)

**President** Peter Bates-Brownsword (Ph 3289 7001)

**Past President** Jim Houston (Ph 3351 4952)

**Vice President** Bob Skitch (Ph 3265 1370)

**Secretary & Asst Treasurer** Mary-Ann Thiselton (Ph 3353 1026)

**Treasurer** Michael Knight (3278 8331)

**Functions Member** Alex Cairney (Anzac Day, Reunion) (Ph 3397 7583)

**Bulletin Editor** Bob Skitch (Ph 3265 1370)

**Membership Records** Kim Weston (Ph 5445 6927; mob 0427 377 226)

**WW2 Veteran Member** Hal Jones (Ph 3395 1404)

**Squadron Liaison & Welfare** Jim Gill (Ph 3264 1597)

**Member (unallocated)** Stan Campbell (Ph 3285 3970)

**Squadron OC** Major WM (Bill) Thomson

**Squadron SSM** WO1 BL (Barrie) Craymer (Ph 3332 7564)

**Note:** Refer Veteran's Affairs matters to Peter Bates-Brownsword and Stan Campbell  
Association address: **PO Box 5784; Stafford Heights 4053**

## LAST FRIDAY OF THE MONTH DRINKS

This regular informal event continues at the Gaythorne RSL and Rock advises that numbers attending continue to increase. There is ample parking at the Club. When is it? The last Friday of the month of course, next on **Fri 31 January 2003**. Check with Rock Thiselton (Ph 3353 1026) to be sure.

## ASSOCIATION BADGE

All current stocks sold but 'Magna Carto' advises that there is to be a re-run – same size but in 'antique gold' or bronze finish. The cost is to be \$10.00. They will be available at the launch of 'Mapmakers of Fortuna', however, the Queensland Association will pre-purchase a number. Let our secretary Mary-Ann know your requirements.

## INCORPORATION – the vexed question!

It seems that despite our cheque sitting in the Corporate Affairs office for the best part of a year, it has not been presented and at our request now returned to the Association. Hence we are **NOT** an incorporated Association at this point. Apparently we are not alone. Many other similar organizations are in the same boat. The advice is to hold tight till a number of matters are resolved, presumably on the issue of compulsory indemnity insurance. So the matter is on the back-burner again. Frankly, the cost of indemnity insurance would rapidly deplete our funds as they stand without probably doubling our present annual subscription. As one ex-service body put it – we are running our chook raffles to pay an insurance company!

## ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTIONS FOR 2001 – 2002 & 2002 - 2003

**This notice has to be a permanent fixture of our Bulletin, so here it is again:- 'Don't go to sleep on your membership!'**

**Keep in touch with you Survey Corps mates by being a paid-up member of your Association.**

"DONT GO TO SLEEP"  
ON YOUR MEMBERSHIP



Our financial year runs from September to September. Subscription is but \$10.00 per year. We encourage you to pay three years in advance (or more if you wish). Some have

already done this. Subscription is waived for veterans 75 and over who have been standing paid-up members of our Association.



**A photo from the Mapmaker's Dinner – Tony and Loretta Gee**

**DEREK CHAMBERS AWARD  
PRESENTATION**

Friday 15<sup>th</sup> November saw the presentation of the Derek Chambers Award for 2002 to Sgt Diana Soutar of the 1<sup>st</sup> Topographical Survey Squadron RAE. Squadron OC, Major Bill Thompson welcomed Association members attending and re-affirmed the ties between the Squadron and the Association. SSM WO1 Barrie Craymer announced the recipient as Sgt Diana Soutar. In doing so, Barrie stated: *Sergeant Diana Soutar has made a long lasting and consistent contribution to the morale of her troop, unit and trade. She has faithfully and diligently discharged her duties as treasurer of the Survey United Social Club and in so doing, her dealings with all persons regardless of rank or station are courteous, friendly and helpful at all times. Sgt Soutar is active and self-motivating in the organisation of social functions for Data Support Troop and the Social Club. Well respected and well liked by all ranks, Sergeant Soutar's thoughtful and compassionate administration of her soldiers makes her easy to work for and work with. She maintains her consistent good humour in the face of trial and is able to infect others with it readily. Always capable of a smile, Diana is a valued member of the Unit and a pleasure to have around.*

Our President, Peter Bates-Brownsword, then presented the award, the shield now bearing Sgt Soutar's name and a copy of the Corps history, *Australia's Military Mapmakers*.

There was good representation from the Association. As well as Peter, I recall seeing Rock and Mary-Ann Thistelton, Michael and Val Knight, Barry Lutwyche, Hank Opdem, Ace and Mrs Howard, Graeme Dowd, and perhaps others. On arriving at the Squadron, Association members were taken of a short tour of the technical areas and were able to see some of the Squadron's superb high tech equipment, including the truck-mounted mobile work-stations. A display of field equipment was set up outside; a 'total station' (computer supported theodolite with laser distance measuring and press-button recording), GPS, and a remarkable gyroscopic laser rangefinder.

The presentation took place in the increasingly well fitted out social club

Lysaught Hut and this report would not be complete without some mention of the weather. As proceedings got underway,

Brisbane and especially Enoggera, was hit by a severe tropical storm. The lightning was spectacular, the thunder deafening and even more deafening was the drenching rain bucketing and beating on the roof of the Lysaught Hut. Even Barrie with his best SSM's parade ground voice could barely be heard and I think Peter finally gave up! But we needed the rain (fortunately no hail) which persisted across Brisbane and south-eastern Queensland for the following two days, re-invigorating our gardens and topping up our swimming pools.

**Bob Skitch**

**PERSONALIA and other Jottings**

**John Gray** (shown on our membership list as 'de Gray – John') phoned from Sydney inquiring about the photo of 5 Coy blokes at Wongabel in our July Bulletin – part of Phil Armstrong's vale. John served with 5 Coy from June 1942 to September 1945, finishing up at Labuan. He remembers Phil and is saddened at his passing. The photo was too small for John to recognise faces so I have sent him a digitally enlarged version. In a subsequent phone call John said he still had trouble and wasn't even sure which face was his.

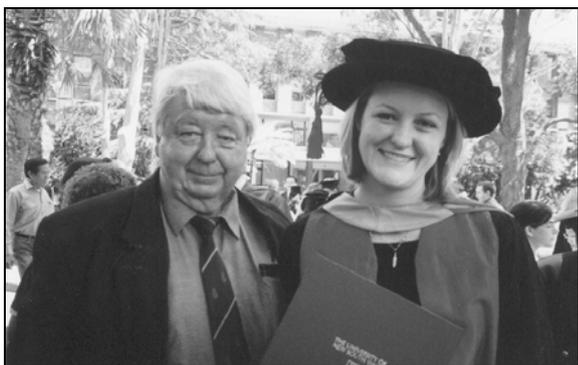
John and his wife celebrated their 50<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary recently and are 'as well as can be expected'. John at 79 is active and plays a good round of golf and belongs to the Balmoral Beach Club, swimming with them frequently – summer and winter? – John didn't say! Bridge is another interest and dabbling in the stock market.

It is quite a while since John attended one of our reunions; however, he remembers quite a few of his 5 Coy comrades – Hal Jones, Jim Houston and others. In civilian life John has been a civil engineer, completing his degree after the war at the University of Queensland and then going on to a Master's Degree in the UK. John also spoke of AA (Ack Ack) Jones. John explained the 'de' which we have erroneously attached to his surname. It is in fact his second initial with which he was christened. His surname is plain 'Gray'. John comments he has lived with this problem all his life.

**Dave Christie** was in Brisbane attending Hans Kramer's funeral in September. Many would remember Dave from his time with the old Eastern Command Field Survey Unit (later 2 Fd Svy Sqn), the Troop in Vietnam (1966/67), the School and later, the Regiment. Dave had an interesting start to his military career. He served as a National Serviceman in the British Army then joined the Australian Army and served with 'K' Force in Korea. On return to Australia he went to Southern Command as driver and was posted to the Map Depot at Kensington where he had a long association. Dave managed to get on to a Basic Course in the late 50s and that was the start of his career in Survey. Posted initially back to the Map Depot he moved on to E Comd Fd Svy in 1963 and was with the Detachment of the 1st Topographical Survey Troop as a warrant officer when it went to Vietnam in 1966.

Leaving the Corps after 20 years service in 1973, Dave undertook teacher training and a degree in survey related disciplines. He joined the staff of the Caulfield Technical College where he continued until retirement a few years ago. Dave had a brush with cancer recently and we are happy to say he has beaten it.

**Alex Cairney** had a few proud days in Melbourne at the end of October. He visited that fair city to see the conferral of a PhD in engineering on his daughter Julie. No surprise to anyone who has worked with Alex. The Cairney genes are pretty impressive.



Alex and Julie

**Paul Hopes** was farelled at the last Friday of the month drinks last month. Paul is to return to Bendigo! Why would anyone want to do that – leave Brissy's fair climes for Bendigo? No doubt Paul has his reasons.

**Jack Cavill** served in 2 Fd Svy Coy during WW2. A qualified surveyor he spent some of

his war service teaching recruits the art and practice of surveying in NSW. Jack is now in his 86<sup>th</sup> year and has spent much of his post WW2 life in academia in WA. He was (and is) well known to many RASvy personnel who studied for their surveying degrees in the west. At the end of his time with the University of WA Jack wrote a text on engineering surveying. It is intensely practical and remains relevant. Engineering surveying doesn't change all that much. Jack retained an interest in the Survey Corps throughout his long career. He lives in WA and is hale and hearty. **(From information supplied by Don Swiney)**

**Wandering the King's Highway:** Those of us who attended the Squadron's Dining Out Night on 12<sup>th</sup> October 2002 were impressed and delighted to hear the Queensland University Band's rendition of the official march of the Royal Australian Survey Corps, *Wandering the King's Highway* preceding the toast to the Corps and the Association. I recall the Corps March was introduced somewhere in the mid-sixties after a call for suggestions. The popular choice was *The Happy Wanderer* but that tune at the time had already been allocated to the SAS, so we fell back on Kipling.

**The mystery of the Kairi baseline remains!** Sorry Lloyd (Twine) so far no one has suggested a reason for the baseline terminal being atop a maize silo. Bill Kitson has checked the State records but they make no comment on how or why South Base is so positioned. Perhaps someone from 5 Coy can shed some light on it.

#### SICK PARADE

**George Timmins** The bad news is George has had a brush with cancer of the prostate but the good news is he has received the 'all clear'. George attended IET at the School in 1969 and in the years that followed served with 2 Fd Svy Sqn, Murray Barracks in PNG and the Survey Regiment in the late 70s. While at the Regiment he was posted to the Recruit Training Battalion at Kapooka, one of a number of Survey Corps junior and senior NCOs to serve in the recruit training role. George retired from the Corps as SSM of 1 Field Survey Squadron a few years ago and has remained in Brisbane.

**Brigadier Don MacDonald:** Don has had a set-back in health recently but I am happy to advise that he is mending rapidly. He is planning to attend the Regiment's history launch in March 2003 – God willing – and we fully expect He will!



## 1<sup>ST</sup> TOPOGRAPHICAL SURVEY SQUADRON

**'More than JUST MAPS'** – so reads the heading of 1 Topo's article in the recently released *'Sapper News 2002'*. *Sapper News* is a Corps publication of the Royal Australian Engineers sponsored by a number of civilian engineering organizations and issued annually. This year's edition is in full colour and contains many photographs of sappers in action. Each RAE unit is separately featured with a run down of its activities over the preceding twelve months.

The publication is distributed to all ex RAE and ex RASvy Associations, the latter including all of our State and some of our unit Associations.

Far be it for me to even attempt to précis the 1 Topo contribution even given that I could interpret the plethora of current military acronyms and jargon contained within. However, the opening paragraphs of the article certainly throw some light on the purpose and function of the Squadron. The opening statement reads *'1 Topo Svy Sqn Engineers are the Army's terrain experts. We are to ones who "know and shape the physical battlespace".....1 Topo is a highly specialized unit whose role is to provide operational and tactical level geospatial support to land operations....The obvious question is "What is geospatial support?" The textbook definition is that geo support is an element of mobility and survivability that includes the actions taken to acquire and manage military geospatial information (MGI) about the physical dimensions and to produce and distribute visualization and decision support products.* Thankfully the article goes on to provide a plain English interpretation of that statement..... *The layman's version is that we collect data from various sources, including satellite imagery, aerial cameras, reconnaissance reports, GPS and traditional field survey, and then turn that raw information into a variety of*

*products and advice that supports the planning and conduct of operations. As we say: "More than just maps!"*

The Sapper article then gives a run down of the Squadron's activities throughout the year, its internal training exercises, its involvement in the larger military exercises and operations including its continuing commitment to East Timor. Much of this has been covered in previous 1 Topo reports published in each of our Association Bulletins throughout the year. On the lighter side the article comments *that during the conduct of an Air Camera Course.... numerous 'spew bags' were also tested during the flight phase with AA Avn 173 Surveillance Sqn.....* I can relate to that one!  
**Bob Skitch**

### VIETNAM – A TECHNICAL TOUR with the 1<sup>ST</sup> Topographical Survey Troop

*by RM McMillan-Kay*

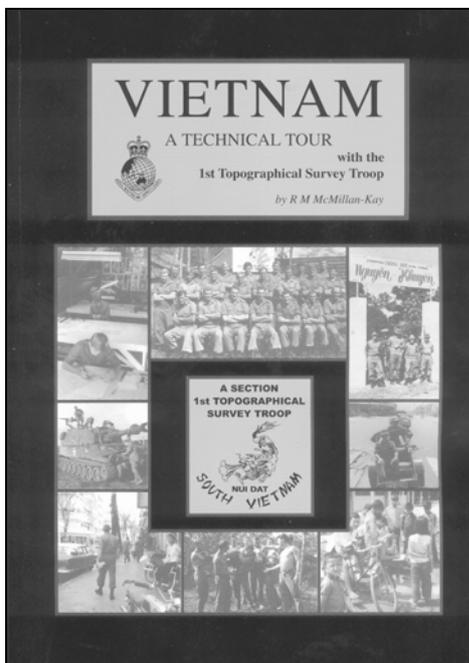
A book launch at Maleny on Saturday 23 November 2002 – reported by **Bob Skitch**

I had the pleasure of attending the launch of Bob McMillan-Kay's personal history of his tour of duty in Vietnam in 1969. The launch took place at the Maleny RSL Hall where Bob has quite a personal stake as curator of the 'Lighthouse Museum'. The launch was well attended by members of the Maleny RSL as well as the book's publisher. Also attending were Major Bill Thompson (OC 1 Topo Svy Sqn RAE) and Association members Kevin Walsh, Ken Lyons and Bob Skitch. Quite a few of the Maleny RSL fellows served in Vietnam in various capacities and were well aware of the Topo Troop's involvement.

Bob had a table layout of Vietnam memorabilia, some general, of a 'tourist' nature, (in 1995 Bob revisited Vietnam – Nui Dat, Vung Tau et al) but more relating to the 1969 period such as folders of SVN currency – the Piastre, in Bob's time called the Dong but still called colloquially the 'P' – and the US Military Payment Certificates (MPC). Also on display were samples of the Topo Troop's mapping from 1966 – Hoa Long and Bin Gia Specials – and sets of monthly reports from 1966/67 and Bob's year, 1969. Some of this is reproduced in his book. The display attracted a lot of attention.

The Maleny RSL Vice President, Frank Beattie called the gathering together and introduced Bob, the author and the publisher,

John Bannister of Joshua Books. Bob spoke briefly of what motivated him to write the history, a 15 year labour of love perhaps, certainly a burning commitment; what the experience meant to him – Bob was a very young man in Vietnam – and his 1995 re-visit. Publisher John Bannister spoke also of Bob's dedication to the project and the production process. Bob Skitch said a few words about the early raising and mounting of the Troop, complimenting Bob on his effort – the first published volume of that understated period of Survey Corps' history. Major Bill Thompson spoke of the continuing role of the RAE Topo Squadron and the intention to maintain the history and traditions of the past. The book was formally presented by Bob. tea and drinks served and the bar opened. Altogether, it was a very fitting launch.

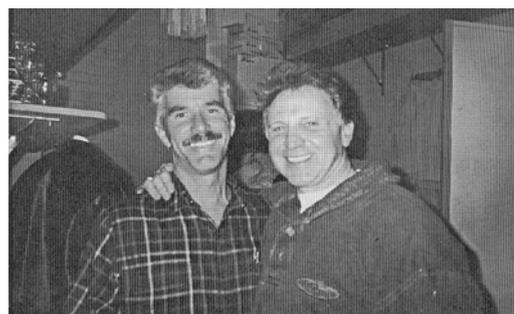


A word about the book: I haven't read all of Bob's book yet but the parts I have read tell me that it is a remarkable account of a young soldier's personal experience in that place. It is eminently readable and once started, hard to put down. It is not just about the year spent in Vietnam, but what caused Bob to join the Army in the first place, select the Survey Corps; his recruit training, Corps training at the School and his persistence in volunteering for Vietnam. The story of Bob's year in Vietnam is a 'warts and all' account told with humour. However, it is far from being an inconsequential account. It has its serious side as well – through Bob's eyes, why we were there and the subsequent

consequences of being there – the cool reception given by the public and even the RSL to veterans of an increasingly unpopular war on return to Australia. The book is illustrated with numerous photographs from Bob's personal collection and maps, both examples of the Troop's work and locational maps of 'where we were'. In final chapters Bob reflects back over the 25 years since Vietnam and tells of his re-visit in 1995. A nominal role of all personnel who served in Vietnam with the Troop is included as an appendix.

Much has been written of the Vietnam experience – unit histories and more formal war histories, some personal accounts as well as TV documentaries. The TV production of *Australians at War* devoted an episode to Vietnam and it was a moving account dealing not only with some history of the conflict but also with its impact on the soldiers who served there. I can't claim to be an avid student of the Vietnam war and all that has been written but somehow I believe that Bob's account of his personal experience serving in a technical support unit is unique. I doubt that it has many if any parallels.

*Vietnam – A Technical Tour* is published in A4 format perfect bound. It comprises 176 pages of light gloss paper with a soft cover in 'army' dark green with red bordered deep yellow title panels. Cost is \$30.00 and orders can be taken by Bob Skitch or our Secretary Mary-Ann Thistleton. Flyer ia attached to this Bulletin.



**Bob McMillan-Kay with entertainer and Vietnam veteran Normie Rowe in 1996**

### **A SPECIAL EVENT IN DARWIN**

A special event occurred in Darwin in July of this year when a plaque was placed at the Darwin Cenotaph to commemorate the contributions of the Northern Territory based Survey Corps Units to the war effort<sup>1</sup>. The

event was arranged by the Northern Territory Branch of the Institution of Surveyors, Australia. A number of activities were arranged by the Institution for visiting WW2 veterans and the public. As well as the unveiling of the plaque these included an exhibition of maps produced by the NT survey units and a trip to the Adelaide River area to visit the old survey campsite, war cemetery, old survey marks and other points of interest. Veterans were taken on a tour of military historical sites in the Darwin area and treated to a luncheon at the home of Trevor and Helen Menzies. Trevor is a past President of the Northern Territory Division of the Institution.

Queensland Association members Artie McClure and Laurie Hansen with their partners attended the event in Darwin. Both were members of the 7 MD Svy Sec (7 Fd Svy Sec) in 1942 and 1943. Artie has promised a report on the event with photos and these will be included in the April Bulletin next year.

**Ed Note:** There has long been a relationship between the Army Survey Service (previously the Royal Australian Survey Corps but now the Royal Australian Engineers) and the Institution of Surveyors Australia (ISA), the professional institution representing practising surveyors Australia-wide. From time to time over the years the ISA has promoted the interests of military surveying and the ISA was represented on the Commonwealth Survey Committee, the body that gave coordination and direction to mapping, both defence and civil in Australia from the mid thirties to the 1950s<sup>2</sup>. Many Corps personnel who served

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<sup>1</sup> Like many WW2 survey units the Northern Territory, the unit underwent several name changes. Initially the unit was raised in early 1941 as the 7MD Svy Sec, then became the NT Force Fd Svy Sec, then 1 Fd Svy Sec and finally, 7 Fd Svy Sec. The unit strength was 2 officers and 43 other ranks and the OC was Lt LJ (Lindsay) Lockwood. In 1943 the unit returned south and was replaced by 6 Army Topo Svy Coy under Capt J Tait and carried out extensive mapping in the NT and NW WA. (*Australia's Military Mapmakers – CD Coulthard-Clark*)

<sup>2</sup> ISA representatives on the Commonwealth Survey Committee were Mr GJ Gillespie followed by Mr R Alderton, both Survey Corps officers during WW2 and prominent members of the surveying profession after the war. Bob Alderton remained active in the NSW Corps Association until his recent death.

during WW2 and continued in the surveying profession after the war became prominent members of ISA. Brigadier Don MacDonald served as Federal President of ISA during the 60s and a number of RA Svy officers and some senior NCOs were members also. The Institution has often supported activities of the Corps Associations, more especially those that recognised the service of our WW2 veterans. At one time this bulletin was produced annually by the Brisbane office of the Institution.

## OF RSMs AND HAIR

*by Noel Sproles*

*I was cleaning out a cupboard the other day when I came across an old photo album. In it was a photo of Sappers Noel Sproles and Hans Kramer taken at Balcombe on the road leading to the Mactier Club. I was barely 19 and was sporting a brand new crew cut – the ultimate in cool in the late 50s. If I remember it correctly, it was Hans who egged me on to get it. My mother greeted my crew cut with wide eyed surprise when I next went home on leave. However, her reaction was nothing compared to that from Mr 'Tara' Hocking whom I was to meet some weeks later. Tara was the Regimental Sergeant Major of the Officer Cadet School at Portsea and he was not appointed to that august position because he was a wilting violet or backward in coming forward!*



**Hans Kramer with Noel Sproles on Basic Course at Balcombe**

My first acquaintance with Mr Hocking was when he jumped aboard the bus that had just delivered us to the Officer Cadet School. Lambs to the slaughter comes to mind! He cut a fine figure and every bit of leather and

piece of brass on his uniform glittered and gleamed. His pace stick remained so horizontal that it seemed he must have had a gyroscope hidden in it somewhere. The creases in his KDs were so sharp that you could imagine shaving yourself with them while using his boots as a mirror. Topping it all off, like garnish on a dish of haute cuisine, were several rows of crisp and bright campaign ribbons. His first address to us comprised just one sentence, albeit a very long one! It went like this: "My name is Hocking I am the RSM you call me sir on the command move off the bus form three lines thumbs against the crease of your trousers heels together and feet at thirty degrees MOVE!!!" It went downhill from there.

A few hours later I was struggling back from the Q store with rifle and webbing and kit bag hanging off my back and my arms loaded down with all types of uniforms. As I struggled along I took in the picturesque view of Port Phillip and Mud Island and the ships passing so close to the beach that you could hear the engines thumping. My reverie was shattered by Tara's booming voice from the orderly room verandah. We then had the first of the many single sentence one-way conversations that we would have over the next 12 months. 'Mr Sproles – you will have all year to admire the view look to your front there is a pace ladder in the ground get on to it thirty inch paces LEFT RIGHT LEFT RIGHT HEEL TOE HEEL TOE EYES FRONT'. Bloody hell I thought, how did he know who I was? There goes the protection of anonymity! His secret of course was that photos were taken of all candidates as part of the selection panel process and he had studied every photo and so knew who we were before we even got to Portsea.

He was not without humour. Every now and then we went through the sizing exercise – you know the routine – 'Tallest on the left, shortest on the right' sort of thing. We must have been growing lads to justify the frequency of the operation. Arthur Schaske was bow legged and was always on the short end of the line. Every time we went through the routine, Tara would roar from one end of the parade ground to the other 'Mr Schaske, if you could get your knees together you would be on the other end of the line!' The only possible reply was a crisp 'Yes sir' as to laugh on parade, even at the RSM's feeble

jokes, was to guarantee seeing the sun rise next morning as you attended the defaulters parade.

We had the dubious distinction of graduating into the senior class just as the Army replaced the Lee Enfield .303 rifle with the SLR. While our junior class had only the SLR to deal with, we were blessed with both. When not in use, our rifles were laid out, completely stripped, in our rooms on our 'tables bedside'. The duty cadet would ring the RSM five minutes before morning parade to see which rifle our class had to take on parade. Tara would hum and ha and eventually nominate one. That meant we then had to get one rifle assembled and the other stripped each morning on a few minutes notice with the risk that one mistake or one mark on any component guaranteed a journey down the hill next morning to greet the sun.

Anyhow, I digress. Back to the crew cut. On our first parade, Tara gave each of us his undivided and personal attention. When he got to me, he paled, took a step back and told me in no uncertain terms what he thought of young gentlemen sporting crew cuts! He then uttered a momentous directive that goes so far against the grain for any RSM that I suspect that it was an all time first and has never been repeated since. 'Grow your hair Mr Sproles – you have two weeks to do it!'. What could one say but 'Yes Sir!'

<b>WANNABUGBUG</b> <b>by Bob Skitch</b>
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The Corps history '*Australia's Military Mapmakers*' describes in some detail the remarkable events leading to the first two overseas mapping operations undertaken post WW2 by the Royal Australian Survey Corps. Both were Joint US/Australian operations with the Corps providing the bulk of the technical support. It makes for interesting reading. The operations were named respectively Project Xylon and Project Cutlass. Xylon finally commenced in 1954 and Cutlass in 1956. Xylon, the mapping of New Britain, took 9 months to complete and Cutlass, the mapping of New Ireland and surrounding smaller islands, was of 15 months duration. Both were commanded by the redoubtable Captain, later Major, Spencer Weldon Snow. The History has little to say

about the nature of either operation<sup>3</sup> and the following account deals with a task carried out in Rabaul by a small party of surveyors in the few weeks preceding Cutlass.

The task was a little unusual for the Survey Corps to undertake. It was a cadastral survey to relocate the boundaries of a large but run down copra plantation with the improbable name of 'Wannabugbug'. Wannabugbug was a few kilometres west of Rabaul, over Tunnel Hill (honeycombed with Japanese tunnels from WW2 we were told) in Talili Bay. My understanding was that the site was being considered for acquisition by the Army as a location for a second battalion of the Pacific Island Regiment, a 2PIR. Being a cadastral survey it had to be carried out by a licensed surveyor and such a person was Englishman Lt Mal Nicholas from Western Australia, recently licensed and recently commissioned. Others comprising the party were Sgt Perce Long, Cpl Jim Maher, Spr Joe Farrington and Spr Bob Skitch. Some of us had had cadastral experience before joining the Corps and I suppose that was why we were chosen. The task was performed according to the cadastral requirements of the PNG administration under the overview of Don Matheson, senior surveyor in Rabaul.

For me, a fresh young soldier not long off basic course, it was an experience, not just technical but also social. We departed Brisbane in August 1956 by a Qantas DC4 flight for Port Moresby and then transferred to a Qantas DC3 for Lae where we overnighed at the Hotel Cecil, rebuilt after WW2 but still redolent in the legend of Errol Flynn who spent some time there pre-war. To a romantic minded young soldier this was heady business. Lae, still bearing the very visible scars of WW2, the smell of the tropics and the visible presence of the indigenous New Guineans, lap-lap attired but occasionally in traditional tribal dress also, added to this surreal impact. The Qantas crew around the piano at the Cecil Hotel singing a popular song at the time *'Memories Are Made of This'* gave further emphasis. The following day we resumed the flight to Rabaul via Finschafen

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<sup>3</sup> In fact the photograph opposite page 102 of Blue Crane and Jock Campbell observing a shore ship station is incorrectly ascribed to Project Cutlass 1956. Neither took part on Project Cutlass. The photograph belongs to Project Xylon taken probably in 1954 or 55.

and other ports of call. The passengers seemed mainly indigenous, carrying their worldly possessions including animals, one old lady with a pig clasped to her bosom, breasts like long straps occasionally thrown over a shoulder. We landed at Rabaul under the shadow of the smoking volcano Matupi. The beauty of that magnificent harbour, surrounded by a ring of extinct volcanos, the sulphurous Matupi, the grey cone of Vulcan, the Bee Hives jutting from crystal blue waters, the almost daily tremors and shakes, all this contributed to an unbelievable experience for the boy from the deep south west of Western Australia. But there were other experiences too.

The Territory of Papua and New Guinea in 1956 was very much a colonial backwater. Australians were the masters and the missies and generally acted as such. The lap-lap was the regulation dress for indigenous males and in Rabaul for such a person to wear European shorts or trousers was to invite a trip to the calaboose for being a 'big head'. The rif-raf of Australian society could go to TPNG in those days, don 'planters whites' and be a 'master'! Even if they were not admitted to the New Guinea Club they were certainly welcome at the Rabaul Club and maybe even the Kavieng Club. Independence was not even thought about and in my immature years I would have agreed that these people I saw around me could hardly govern themselves. Thankfully the Australian Army had a different and more far-sighted approach, especially that visionary, Colonel Ian Hunter. Nevertheless, some of the things I heard of or saw shocked me, such as the systematic beating of an indentured plantation labourer selected randomly from the line at the commencement of the daily labour; the constant reference to indigenous people by no less than a resident magistrate as 'rock apes' and a patrol officer carrying a overdue pregnant women in the back of his Landrover a considerable distance on very rough roads when he had an unoccupied seat in the front cab. There was total segregation of the black and white communities. Asians fell somewhere in between. The whole concept of indentured labour on copra plantations fell little short of slavery. On many plantations the labour accommodation was of an appalling standard. And those breaking their indentures

were hunted like criminals and thrown into the calaboose. Back to Wannabugbug.

On arrival in Rabaul our little party was met by Don Matheson and taken to our accommodation, a small cottage within a park area opposite the New Guinea Club and complete with 'house-boys'. Our meals were to be provided in the Works Department Mess and what meals they were! Lavish would be an understatement. We went there for breakfast, collected our 'cut' lunch (and what a lunch it was – fresh baked bread, whole chickens, salad, tropical fruits and juices – there was no end to it!) and returned there for dinner in the evening.

On day two we inspected the job. Wannabugbug was a German established plantation and German surveyors had pegged it out. There must have been at least twenty corners in the surrounding boundary, each marked with a substantial masonry monument the top of which measuring about 30cms square was close to ground level and in the centre was a 4 or 5 cm hole that at one time had had a wooden peg driven into it. Over each corner mark a clump of bamboo had been planted and over the years that clump had grown to a diameter of 20 or more metres. Somewhere within each clump was the mark to be re-located. The boundary lines of the plantation with the possible exception of the roadside was through shoulder high kunai grass. The task was to re-measure all boundaries and re-establish the corners. Spencer said we had two weeks to do it and Don Matheson said it would take three months. We took about one month to complete the task. And who cleared the kunai and bamboo? We all helped but in the main it was carried out by calaboose labour, probably about twenty under the control of two 'police-boys'. They were a mixed bunch, surprisingly willing workers and we were assured in for crimes ranging from murder to indenture breaking to simply giving a white person 'lip'. They wore lap-laps printed with the traditional broad arrow symbol. We got on with the job and in the evening did the reductions and calculations. Occasionally we were invited to the New Guinea Club for a beer but as common soldiers we were not permitted inside (officers only) but were allowed to sit in a shade house outside. Drinks were conveyed to us from time to time and we enjoyed each other's company.

Most afternoons about knock-off time a group of young indigenous student went past on bicycles or walking having been attending the local mission school, presumably returning to their village. One young fellow (a 'piccaninny' in the vernacular of the time) spoke excellent English and showed a lot of interest in what we were doing. Over the course of days he became quite familiar, asking questions about Australia and where we came from. We responded – we didn't mind in the least. He learnt our names and used them. What a heinous crime that was! And so it turned out to be. To our surprise and dismay he turned up in the calaboose line one Monday morning. His crime as far as we could make out was giving cheek to a white person. Don Matheson commented at the time that the ability to speak fluent English had acted against the lad. It marked him as a 'big head'. So our young friend still saw us daily but we were not permitted to speak to him nor he to us. His friends were now the murderers and rapists and those of lesser criminals serving their time in the calaboose.

We finished the job, at least to someone's satisfaction. Wannabugbug was re-defined. It never was acquired by the Army and 2PIR was never raised. That few weeks of cadastral work in later years helped me to gain some remission from the two years cadastral experience required for a surveying licence. I served only 18 months on secondment with the NSW Lands Department so at least for me it wasn't wasted time. Our small party left for Kavieng and a tented camp that was to be our home base for the next 15 months. And there are many more stories that can be told of all that was to follow – and maybe they will be told.