

THE ARTILLERY NEWS.

JUNE - AUGUST 2004



Official Correspondence.

R.A.A Assoc. of Tas. Inc.

Hon. Secretary, Norman B. Andrews OAM., SBStJ.

Tara Room, 24 Robin St;

Newstead. Tas. 7250.

E-Mail: forfar@bigpond.net.au

R.A.A. Association of Tasmania Inc. Homepage: <http://www.tasartillery.o-f.com/>

R.A.A. ASSOCIATION OF TASMANIA INC. CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Meetings of the Historical Wing (North) will continue to be held every two months on the second Thursday of the month at the Inveresk Museum commencing at 2.00 p.m. (Winter Schedule)

All Members and potential members are welcome.

A function is in the process of being organised by 16 Battery, R.A.A. and will be held in Hobart this year. *Details to be advised.*

R.A.A.A.T. Historical Wing (North) Meeting 12/8/2004.

Queen Victoria Museum, Inveresk, at usual venue, starting time 2.00 p.m. Bring a *small* plate to share.

Royal Australian Artillery Association of Tasmania Inc. Annual General Meeting 21/8/2004

Legacy House, 59 York St., Launceston – Afternoon Meeting. Time will be advised by notification.

The meeting will be followed by the launch of a new book about the history of Tasmanian Artillery written by Lt. Col. Doug Wyatt. ALL Members are urged to attend.

R.A.A.A.T. HISTORICAL WING MEETINGS MAY-JUNE 2004

The special May meeting of the R.A.A.A.T. Historical Wing was held at the Friends of the Museum Room at Inveresk on **20/5/2004** commencing on schedule at 2.00 p.m. under the guidance of our conveynor, Norman Andrews O.A.M. This special meeting was called to report on Anzac Day and the RAAAT Committee meeting and social function arrangements to be held on 5/6/2004

Our next scheduled meeting will be on Thursday 10/6/2004 as usual.

Several apologies were received from members due to other weekday commitments. Those in attendance included: Norman Andrews, Gunter Breier, Max Frost, Terry Higgins, Graeme Petterwood, Des Salter, Marc Smith and Frank Stokes. As our format is now relatively informal the few matters of 'business' were concluded quickly and those present were brought up-to-date on several matters that, after consideration, will need to be forwarded to our Committee for discussion.

- (a) How to secure the best method of ensuring that funding for the Anzac Day perpetual wreath is sufficient. This may be possible by changing the current arrangements by including the original bequest within our main financial institution's trusteeship.
- (b) On-going discussion regarding a plaque to be displayed on the Memorial wall at the Cenotaph
- (c) One thing that does need to be addressed is that volunteers from within our organisation are rather scarce just at the moment and we would remind members that '*many hands make light work.*' Don't leave it to just a few to bust their boilers to ensure that our organisation can function as well as it has. **Don't be backward in coming forward, we can really use your help.**

The next informal general meeting of the Historical Wing that took place on **10/6/2004** was attended by Norman Andrews, Gunter Breier, Mark Cameron, Max Frost, Des Salter, Toby Edwards, Charles Tee, Marc Smith, Rick Woods, Frank Stokes, Terry Higgins and Graeme Petterwood.

An apology was received from Lloyd Saunders.

Our conveynor, Norman Andrews, advised the meeting of the results of discussions that took place at R.A.A.A.T. Committee level about items that had been suggested at our last Historical Wing meeting and members were asked for their comments.

In an effort to win recognition of the Artillery's role over the last 140 years plus the R.A.A.A.T. has made approaches to several bureaucratic bodies to assist us with funding or permission to proceed with several tangible projects but we need the weight of member numbers to swing our arguments in the right direction. A few additional comments and alternative approaches were raised that will be taken to the Committee for evaluation. It is recommended that those members who are interested in the affairs of our organisation should make the effort to get their subscription's worth and attend our gatherings.

Mark Cameron re-affirmed that we have some very important items on our agenda at present and others that need to be approached and tackled now in preparation for the all important 150th birthday anniversary of Tasmanian Artillery that will occur in 2012. The job is too large and too important to be shouldered only by the usual few and we need your active support and encouragement to enable us to push these items to successful conclusions. Please, take that step forward!

The informal meeting was followed by a guided tour of a new section of the Museum at Inveresk that will be dedicated to Northern Tasmanian sport at all levels – after the tour we adjourned and returned for an afternoon tea in the Friends of the Museum meeting room.

Our next general meeting will be at 2.00 p.m. at the same venue on August 12th 2004

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 21/8/2004 LEGACY HOUSE - 59 YORK ST. LAUNCESTON.

The **Annual General Meeting** will be held on the afternoon of Saturday 21st August 2004 at Legacy House 59 York St., Launceston, and will be followed by the launch of a new book detailing the history of Tasmanian Artillery written by Lt.Col. Doug Wyatt.

R.A.A.A.T. Old Comrades Social Wing (North) Social Function 5 Jun 2004

The Old Comrades social event was attended by 39 members and guests who braved a rather cold late afternoon/evening function at the Mess. The warm atmosphere (and 'hot air') well and truly made up for the frosty night outside and there was no doubt that a good time was had by all.

Many of our more mature R.A.A.T. members had other careers after their military service and it was no wonder that several groups with common interests also took the opportunity to renew old friendships. A fine effort was made by **Harold Mullins** again this year in collecting \$173.00 from the generous members for the traditional Regimental fund-raising raffle. Deep pockets were no obstacle to Harold, who has long arms and a winning way. Good on you, Harold!

One extra feature during the function was a presentation, made by **Mark Cameron** on behalf of the Launceston City Council, of two Certificates of recognition for volunteer effort within the community.

The very surprised recipients were **Max Frost** and **Graeme Petterwood**. It was a great honour to be recognised and awarded by our City for doing a job that hundreds of other volunteers take on because they want to help – and that includes all those behind the scenes in our own R.A.A.T. organisation.

The smile-provoking repast we had was absolutely top-notch and, at \$10.00 for a large serve roast meal with all the trimmings plus a mouth-watering dessert, it was great value.

The memorable 'Ode of Remembrance' was delivered by **Joe Ferguson** with his usual sincere humility for those comrades who are no longer with us - and, we who go on, repeat his sentiments.

'Lest We Forget'

WE HAVE MAIL

In the limited edition book '**A Tasmanian Gunner's History**' first published in November 1997, and the Internet site <http://www.vision.net.au/~pwood/need.htm> dedicated to the history of the Tasmanian Artillery, I very briefly quoted a previously published Tasmanian Artillery history source that had made an observation about the Pierson Battery in Hobart during WWII.

An e-mail correspondent, **Mr. Maurice Potter**, who is a life-long resident of Fort Direction, recently drew my attention back to the item and forwarded the following comments for consideration.

"In fact, the only shots fired in anger from any gun emplacement on the River Derwent were in 1940, from the Pierson Battery, when a German ship failed to heave-to when ordered.

Mr. Maurice Potter's comments, received - by e-mail May 1st 2004.

"After discussion with a local member of the Army who was stationed at Fort Direction during 1940 who now lives in South Arm, the above requires correction. The ship was not German but an American Liberty ship that failed to respond to signals from the naval command on the hill at Fort Direction. The shot was fired from number two gun at Fort Direction and not from Piersons Point. It has since been confirmed by several other ex-members of the Army who live in South Arm. As you are aware Fort Direction is on the South Arm peninsula. I hope this is of interest to you. I have lived here all my life and saw the changes take place with the development of Fort Direction in September 1939-1945.

My comments, in reply - by e-mail May 1st 2004.

Hello Maurice, Thank you for the information and comments regarding the 'shot fired in anger' as mentioned in your email. I will certainly advise my fellow artillerymen of your comments by means of the next 'Artillery News'. After such a length of time since the article was originally published (November 1997) - and with no previous comment - the 'facts' as originally researched from normally reliable sources were believed to be true. As a non-professional biographer of known 'facts' - well after the event in this instance, it will be of interest to initiate a positive discussion on this subject. I regret that I cannot make amendments to the already published work that was originally produced in book form.

Additional information, received from Mr. Potter – by e-mail May 4th 2004

Thank you for the reply and we understand that it's impossible to change the items that have been written in the past in books etc. An update on the website is all that is required.

The shelling was a thing that was talked about here in South Arm for many years as one returned Serviceman Merv Morley, who is now deceased, was one of the gun crew when all this took place.

The other person is Fred Evens who still lives here in South Arm. Fred was at both Fort Direction and Piersons Point 1940 to 1944. We have other returned men who now live here in South Arm who take a great interest in the history on what took place during the war time.

I was only 10 years old when the war broke out and have not been in the forces, but I was working at Fort Direction for twenty years before I retired seven years ago. I was a security officer, with the Department of Defence during that time, helping look after the ammunition storage there.

Action taken - Website amended May 7th 2004 with Mr. Maurice Potter's comments noted.

GUNNER LUNCH 4th MAY 2004

During a recent trip, R.A.A.T Secretary, Norm Andrews, and ex-Officio member, Lt. Col. Mark Cameron (Col. Comdt. R.A.A. for Tasmania) and a group of prestigious Victorian gentlemen - *and some of their ladies* - gathered for a luncheon appointment in Melbourne's Naval and Military Club.

Their smiling faces reflect that it was an enjoyable event.



Gunner Lunch Tuesday 4th May 2004 – Naval & Military Club, Melbourne

Back Row L – R Maj. Merv Taggart, Lt. Neil Whybrow, Maj. Neil Hammer, Brig. Keith Rossi, Lt.Col. Mark Cameron, Bob Fisher and Norm Andrews.

Front Row L – R Annie Whybrow, Alice Hammer and Mina Taggart.

GIMME THE GUNS

I have had a very nice letter from former **Signaller Ron Ware** of the original **Don Troop, 16 Bty.** of El Alamein fame, alerting me to the fact his surname is spelt with a **'W'** not a 'D' as interpreted and transcribed by me from the original manuscript supplied by the late Charlie McKenzie a few years ago.

I decided to ring Ron in Victoria and we had a great chat about those times, and our mutual mate, the late Charles Gilbert McKenzie.

Ron had received a 'Humourous Mention' from Charlie in the publication, but it was only recently that the book and name spelling error was brought to his notice by 2/8th Unit Asst. Secretary, Mick Bailey. As Ron agreed he might have been **'Dare-ing'** in those days but now he is **'Ware-ing'**.

I assured Ron that I would advise as many of those members I could who received a copy of **'Gimme the Guns'** that they will need to turn to **Page 25** and **Page 71** in the Index and make the slight alterations and I have already corrected the computer records in the event of a second edition being requested.

Frank William McCabe

24th Sept 1920 to 22nd Apr 2004
The Eulogy delivered by Peter Cundall

When a man dies, he leaves behind such a huge, empty void that those who knew him and loved him are wondering how they can possibly fill it. Such a man was Frank McCabe and we're here today for two [2] reasons:

To mourn and grieve his death – and to celebrate his life.

To discover who he was and how he developed and became such a remarkable, wise and wonderful human being – we must look at his truly astonishing life. I must thank Stuart McCabe for most of this history.

Frank William McCabe was born in Bootle, Liverpool on the 24th September 1920. He was the son of William and Ethel MacCabe. He had 5 sisters and 2 brothers. (Frank's surname was incorrectly spelt when his birth was registered and such was people's fear of bureaucracy in those days that his parents thought they would get into trouble if they tried to change it –hence the present day spelling)

His earliest memories were of music. His mother would sing to him and his brothers and sisters. His grandmother had a piano and his Aunt Lil was a chorus girl. He remembered singing every day at school and at Sunday school. The early, cinema had a pianist to play to the action of silent films. Sometimes the player would go to sleep and the audience would throw orange peel at him to make him start playing again.

The McCabe family had a old gramophone with huge horn which seemed to be going all the time. The tunes were mainly songs from the Great War: Tipperary, Roses of Picardy etc.

In those days the streets were full of ex-servicemen maimed in the Great War – lines of them singing and begging because there was no social security.

Liverpool was one of the great seaports of the world and his father would take him to see ships of every description including sailing clippers carrying grain and cotton. The main form of land transport was horses and he remembered seeing huge carts pulled by 8 horses. The street lighting was still gas and not many houses had electricity.

Frank was brought up by his parents and grandmother with whom he lived for long periods, particularly during the depression. He had no memory of being poor; all his family and friends were in the same position and he had a happy childhood.

He left school at 14 and went to work as a Telegraph Boy after passing an entry exam.

At 15 he went dancing at local halls to learn basic dance steps before he could afford to take lessons. He also learned to sneak a pint of beer, smoke and chat up girls.

As a Telegraph Boy he went to night school 2 nights a week for 4 years training to be a Telegraphist. However when he finally qualified there were no Telegraphist jobs available so he became a Postman.

In 1938 he joined the Territorial Army – what we call the Army Reserve. His mother was horrified because War was in sight. In 1939 his Regiment was called up. He always remembered how his mother begged him not to go but he was too excited and couldn't wait.

He thought the war would only last a few weeks.

By the time he was posted overseas in 1942 he had been made a troop sergeant with 3 tanks, 8 men and 1 officer to look after. He served in the 40th Royal Tank Regiment as part of the 23rd Armoured Brigade in the 8th Armoured Division.

His first action was in the Western Desert where 42 out of 50 tanks were lost. His Officer was killed and Frank was made an acting troop officer until another could be found. In this role he had to attend officer briefings and met General Montgomery. He remembered that Monty had "a funny little squeaky voice" and that he vowed to sacrifice all his tanks if necessary to get the infantry through.

Frank McCabe was wounded at El Alamein when his tank was blown up by a mine. While recovering in hospital he learned that he was likely to be posted to another unit on his recovery. So he quietly walked out of the hospital and made his way to depot where new trucks were being delivered to the front line.

He simply joined a queue of potential drivers. No questions were asked and he was given a truck to deliver. Instead he drove it straight to his old unit in the line and was back with his mates again. Then he was given a new tank and went through the rest of bitter fighting of North African campaign against Rommels' Afrika Corps. That lasted until the Germans surrendered in Africa in May 1943.

After training and re-equipping he took a leading part of the assault on the Italian mainland and was involved in the massive, bloody battle at Salerno beachhead. After 4 days Franks was once again wounded and evacuated to a Hospital Ship and later to a convalescent camp. Eventually he was sent to Algeria as a training instructor before returning to Italy to set up training schools at Bovina.

It was there that he met the love of his life a girl from Barnsley Sylvia Bullock.

They were engaged in December 1944 and married in Perugia in Italy in March 1945. During that period Frank was gaoled for returning late from a weekend leave to visit Sylvia who was posted about 400 miles away. Sylvia sent him a fruit cake with a nail file inside but fortunately he was released within a few days and didn't have to resort to it.

Their honeymoon was spent in Rome where they stayed at the YWCA. Because officers were also staying there Sylvia was too shy to leave her room the next morning so sent Frank to find breakfast. He returned with a bunch of carrots and a bottle of champagne.

The war brought about 3 things which affected the rest of Frank's life:

He met and married the love of his life.

He formed an affection for Australians because he had served with them.

He developed a hatred of War but strangely – a love of the army.

After the war Frank and Sylvia returned to Liverpool. Frank returned to work for the post office and rejoined the Territorial Army. Carol was born in December 1946 followed by 5 boys in regular succession. At that time Frank realised that employment opportunities in Liverpool were limited so decided to emigrate to Australia in the hope of a better future for his family.

He came here in November 1959 with Sylvia about to give birth (David), six other children and 3 pounds in his pocket. He soon got a job driving for Holyman's but quickly found other work as a radio and appliance repairman using skills acquired in the army. After the birth of David, more children followed until Hilary arrived – a sister for Carol. Then more children followed. Finally there were 12 of them – 6 Poms and 6 Aussies.

Frank took as much overtime as he could get to enable him to support his family. He started doing "backyard" appliance repairs for extra money and still found time for the army reserve which he re-joined in Australia.

In fact the army had very great difficulty in getting rid of him and long after he reached the compulsory retirement age he and his great mate John Gunn decided to stay on "just to help out". They regularly attended camp until 1997 when Frank was "forced to go off parade because of a spinal injury". He was 77.

In February 1985 Sylvia and Frank lost their beloved son Stephen. His grief was in no way diminished because Stephen was one of twelve. He loved each of his children as if they were an only child.

Frank's later years were highlighted by the births of his 34 grandchildren and 6 great-grandchildren. He lived at Rosevears for nearly 40 years and his house was full of fun and laughter. He loved to hold parties, most of them memorable, and many saved from an early finish by the injection of "some of Dad's Home Brew."

He was constantly changing rooms, adding on and renovating and it made no difference to him whether he knew what he was doing or not. It came as a relief to everyone when Grant became a tradesman.

He maintained regular contact with his English relatives and took several holidays there, always managing to find the money from somewhere. In turn, his relatives made regular visits here, one of the

highlights of which was a visit from all of his sisters at the one time. The thing which became apparent during all of these visits is that he was loved by everyone.

He had a wonderful sense of humour which he maintained to the end. When visiting him at hospital he would invariably be in conversation with other patients but he would dismiss them saying "oh well it was nice to talk to you but you'll have to bugger off now..." Recently he rang his sister in England declaring "Hello luv, it's me Frank, ringing from me death bed..." He knew it was true but he joked about it anyway.

Frank McCabe has now departed from us. But he's left behind his philosophy of total honesty, courage, perseverance, an incredible loyalty; a love of people and a deep understanding of the power of a united loving family and true friendship. He was one of the kindest, wisest, most generous human beings I've ever met.

And all these wonderful qualities he's passed on to his family and to all those who were lucky enough to have known him and loved him. These characteristics are just part of the wonderful heritage he's left with us.

Frank McCabe was a working class lad born in Bootle who became a prince among men. It was such a great honour to have known him – loved him – and be loved by him.

(Quote from Shakespeare's "Hamlet" "Good night sweet Prince – and flights of angels sing thee to thy rest." *This eulogy was retyped from notes supplied by Stuart McCabe.*

Gunners will fondly remember Frank from Frank's days in 6 Field Regiment and then at Stony Head Range (Oxley House).

Gunner Michael Bernard Williams MM

Eulogy provided by COL Arthur Burke, Colonel Commandant RAA, Northern Region.

Sadly, another of the special individuals of the Gunner Brotherhood has passed away. There were not many Military Medals awarded to RAA National Servicemen in Vietnam. Neither were there many awarded to private rank Gunners.

Arguably unique for these distinctions was Gunner Michael Bernard Williams MM who was a forward observer party signaller with (then) Captain John Phillips in 106th Field Battery, 4th Field Regiment RAA in 1967-68. The Viet Cong and North Vietnamese Army mounted their fierce Tet Offensive throughout South Vietnam in January 1968. The 1st Australian Task Force (less one battalion group) was deployed on Operation Coburg some 40 km from Saigon to protect approaches to the major US base at Bien Hoa. Attached to Major Graeme Chapman's C Company, 7 RAR on 7 February 1968, Mike was seriously wounded in the head as his group withdrew from a bunker complex under heavy enemy fire from three directions. He became pinned down some 30 metres in front of FO Phillips who yelled fire orders to him. An extract from Mike's citation states:

Gunner Williams was pinned down in an area which offered little protection but provided an excellent site for communications. Gunner Williams, without thought for his own safety, protected his radio with his body and maintained communications with the field battery providing close support fire seriously wounded in the head, [he] still remained at his post passing fire orders which resulted in most effective artillery fire which was a major factor in ensuring the final success of [his company's] assault. Once the position became relatively stable [some forty minutes later] a replacement for Gunner Williams was brought forward but even then Gunner Williams remained on duty until he was satisfied the replacement had been fully briefed and communications were still open. Only then did [he] seek medical attention.

The personal courage of Mike Williams and his devotion to duty were outstanding, reflecting great credit upon himself, his Regiment and the Australian Army and he was justly awarded the Military Medal for this action. Repatriated back to Australia to convalesce, he was then discharged on medical grounds. For the rest of his life, Mike carried a metal plate in his head as a legacy of 7 February 1968.

Mike returned to Cooma where he had been brought up and after 12 months as a cadet with the local shire council, he headed for the bright lights of Canberra and joined the Department of Foreign Affairs. His 106 Battery close friend, Rob Gowling recounts that there he met Roz, they had a 'foreign affair' and were married. Postings to Sweden, Romania, Argentina, Hawaii and Washington followed. He had a most successful career and is quoted as saying that 'wearing the MM and being an Artillery Gunner opened many doors'. Being a Vietnam veteran eased the strain in heady discussions on security in Washington and he was well-known by his christian name in many forums where others were addressed as 'General', 'Group Captain' and 'Commander'. Rob Gowling suggests that a highlight of his time in FA was being taken in a US Marine general's car to a gathering of 'a couple of the boys' to 'chew the fat' on how Uncle Sam could assist with the forthcoming ANZAC Day service. With a strong introduction by the general, Mike was amazed at the competition between Hawaii's head 'boys' of the Army, Navy, Marine and Air Force - all trying to help.

In 1996, stress finally forced Mike to retire from Foreign Affairs and he automatically became a TPI pensioner. A tumour in the bowel was first detected in early June last year, he underwent surgery and sustained weekly treatment until February this year. By April it was apparent that he would not escape and he succumbed on 10 July 2004.

Rob Gowling describes Mike having a great personality, a wonderful attitude to life, a firmly respected 'Micta' (family Dad) and a great love for fly fishing. I had the privilege of knowing Mike through the fight for the good name of 106th Field Battery last year - following publication of the latest official Australia war history, 'On the Offensive'. He was tenacious in his aim; wrote well, credibly and with conviction; and lent his good name and strong support in every possible way to uphold the proud name of the 'Turtles' of 1967-68. Mike is survived by his widow Roz; children Lisa, Justin and Dan (wife Michelle); and granddaughter Caitlyn.

Roz's contact details are:

35 Symers Street
Kambah ACT 2902
02 6231 1228

Vale Michael Bernard Williams MM - proud Nasho, decorated Gunner, successful Foreign Affairs executive, devoted family man and the best friend a Turtle from 1967-68 could have - parading for the last time after only 59 years.

LEST WE FORGET

The Artillery News.

Graeme E. Petterwood. (Editor).

P.O. Box 10, Ravenswood. 7250. Tasmania.

Email: pwood@vision.net.au

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