

THE ARTILLERY NEWS.

SEPTEMBER - NOVEMBER 2007



Official Correspondence.

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R.A.A.A.T.

GUNNER DINNER – HOBART

The annual Gunner dinner was recently held in Hobart and attracted an attendance of approx. 90 – and, as usual, a great night was had by all.

During the evening, **Colonel Mark Cameron RFD**, Colonel Commandant Tasmania Region, presented an address to remind us of our proud Australian Gunner heritage – and, with permission, his address is well worthy of repeating.

CORAL ADDRESS

TASMANIAN GUNNER DINNER 2007

Presented by

COL MARK CAMERON RFD

COLONEL COMMANDANT TASMANIA REGION

When people like Steve Carey, Bob Fisher and I were coached in tactics by the likes of Peter Hodge; we learned that there were phases such as the *Defence* and the *Advance to Contact*. So it was in South Vietnam 40 years ago.

Last year, we recalled the *Defence* - and the ***Battle of Long Tan.***

Next May, the Royal Regiment of Australian Artillery will officially commemorate an *Advance to Contact* and what history records as ***The Battle of Coral***.

The Australian Taskforce had spent the previous year consolidating its presence in Phuoc Tuy Province. A decision was made that the Australians would assist in the defence of Saigon, the capital of South Vietnam, where the defeated Viet Cong and North Vietnamese were understood to be in full retreat following their *Tet* Offensive against major population centres.

In an operation, which had many of the hallmarks of ANZAC, the Australians were inserted north of Saigon to assist the cut-off forces.

Like ANZAC, reconnaissance and intelligence were poor; the Australians and New Zealanders were landed at the wrong place; the morning insertion was delayed until late afternoon and most significantly, rather than a trail for a retreating remnant of a defeated force, the area was occupied and controlled by fresh, determined North Vietnamese troops preparing to again move south to Saigon.

Into this setting the Australian Task Force (minus) including **12 Field Regiment** comprising **102 Fd Bty**, and **161 (NZ) Fd Bty** - supported by **131 Div Loc Bty** - were hastily deployed in the late afternoon in full view of the enemy.

As gunners we have always understood that whilst the infantry will protect us as best it can, the final defence of the gun position rests with the gunners themselves.

So it was with 102 Fd Bty at their ill prepared ***Fire Support Base Coral*** adjoining elements of 1RAR; its Battalion HQ; Mortar PI, Assault Pioneer PI, Anti Tank PI and the Regimental HQ of 12 Fd Regt.

In the early morning of 13th May 1968, the inevitable happened and *FSB Coral* was attacked by a far superior and highly motivated North Vietnamese force.

Suffice to say the defensive perimeter was penetrated. One gun was over-run and effectively destroyed. Subsequently, a counter-penetration force led by the GPO recaptured the gun as the enemy were driven off.

As the enemy withdrew, the gunners, despite their losses, responded to the call for fire, firstly two guns, then three, then five. The sixth gun (No 4), which had been lost and regained was too badly damaged to contribute but 102 Field Battery remained an operational Battery.

Such ferocious defences of the gun positions is, fortunately, not common. It has not been until recent times that NATO gunners of the Royal Artillery and the Royal Canadian Artillery have again seen such close quarter fighting in defence of their guns, this time in Afghanistan – the accounts of which are on a par with *Coral* and the subsequent battle for *FSB Balmoral*.

We, in Tasmania, shared the comradeship of many who served at the Battle of Coral. The GPO (Ian Ahern) subsequently served as the Adj. of 6 Fd Regt. Bob Lowry, Section Commander and National Serviceman had grown up in Tasmania. Brian Murtagh, 2IC of 12 Field Regiment had served here at

Anglesea Barracks. John Burns served as SMIG with 16 Fd Bty and Philip Bennett, CO of 1 RAR became Governor of Tasmania. - and, of course, the list goes on.

Ladies and gentlemen, to commemorate the Battle of Coral, the Royal Regiment of Australian Artillery will, next year, host a national ceremony in Canberra (**Tuesday 13th and Wednesday 14th May 2008**).

We hope the RAA Association of Tasmania will represent the Tasmanian Gunner community at the commemoration.

The Regiment is also seeking the battle honour of “Coral” to be bestowed on 102 Bty and that in future it will be known formally as ‘Coral Battery, R. A. A. This is indeed a rare honour for a Battery and will be the first for the Royal Regiment of Australian Artillery - a fitting tribute to those gunners who fought so gallantly and to the 11 Infantrymen and Gunners who paid the ultimate sacrifice in the early hours of 13th May 1968.

Additional notes:

Fire Support Base Coral was a fire and patrol base used by Australian, American and New Zealand troops during the Vietnam War. The base was situated 20 kilometres north of the city of Bien Hoa. On May 13, 1968, troops from the North Vietnamese Army's 7th Division launched a surprise attack on **Coral**, The battle, which consisted of several actions, went on for 26 days. The action was biggest unit-level battle of the Vietnam War that involved Australians

Internet Access: <http://www.diggerhistory.info/pages-battles/coral.htm>



FSB Coral - Number 4 gun – AWM photo. (AWM P01769.011)

SPECIAL NOTE

Take the time to look in at the official web-site if you have access – it has had a substantial overhaul and the upgrade is very pleasing indeed.

Refer: - <http://www.tasartillery.com/>

NORTHERN HISTORICAL SOCIAL WING.

Our June meeting was held at the QV Museum & Art Gallery complex at Inveresk as usual and those members in attendance discussed the final arrangements for the Launceston Artillery Old Comrades Social Wing winter luncheon function to be held at South Launceston Football clubrooms on the revised date 23 June 2007. Afternoon tea was enjoyed by all. The following detail has now been supplied by our Secretary, Norm Andrews, regarding the successful event:.

He also thanks all those who donated items for the lucky door prizes.

*“A successful luncheon has been conducted today at the South Launceston Football Club rooms with **41 attending** and an enjoyable time was had by all. (The attendance and apologies list was attached).*

Also please note that the members present, today, 23 June, requested that the next social function for the Launceston group be set now; and it has been set down for the evening of Wednesday the 28th November 2007 at 1830hrs for 1900hrs..

EARLY WARNING ORDER NOTICE

To ALL past and serving GUNNERS

Invitation to the annual St. Barbara's Day social function

Wednesday 28th November 2007

South LAUNCESTON FOOTBALL CLUB rooms

1830Hours for 1900 Hours–until late

Please mark this date in your diary now.

It should be another great evening with your gunner mates and partners. Dress neat smart casual wear please.

RSVP and cost details will follow in the usual manner.

Refreshments are available at Club prices.

At our 9th August meeting, commencing at 2.15 p.m. in the Friend's Lounge at the QV Museum & Art Gallery, Inveresk, we were fortunate to have a very interesting video presentation of an analysis about the **Battle of Long Tan**.

Those R.A.A.A.T. Northern members who managed to attend were:

Norm Andrews, Gunter Breier, Joe Ferguson, Terry Higgins, Des Salter, Marc Smith, Frank Stokes, Graeme Petterwood and Rick Wood.

Even though this was an informal gathering, formal apologies were received from Charles Tee, Lloyd Saunders and Max Frost

The video tape was kindly supplied courtesy of our Hobart-based member, Col. Mark Cameron RFD - who managed to brave the atrocious weather we were having and traveled north to make one of his too rare appearances at one of our informal meetings. He was warmly welcomed.

We have previously published Col. Cameron's 2006 address on the Long Tan battle but the official Army video analysis highlighted the great difficulties our gunner mates had to endure. At the end of the showing, Norm and the other members thanked Mark for his consideration in making the video available to us.

SPECIAL DATES

Next General Meeting: At the invitation of Mr. Eric Ryan.

Thursday October 11th at 2.00 p.m. (Launceston Show Day)

Venue: St Basil's Room, Mount Esk Aged Care Facility - 38 Station Rd; St Leonards. *Please bring a plate to share....*

Annual General Meeting

Saturday 17th November, 2007 - Time: 2.00 p.m.

Launceston (Venue to be advised)

All members - and those who wish to join - are invited to attend.

Annual subs are due if you haven't already remitted.

Bereavement.

R.A.A.T member, Bevan Filce, has advised of the death of **Dick Duggan** who was BSM of 16 Fd Bty back in the mid 60's Dick is remembered as an efficient BSM prior to his transfer to 106 Battery R.A.A. in 1967. When he had finished his tour with the Army, he took a position as head ranger in the Warrumbungle Wild Life Park near Coonabarrabram on the mainland. He had the respect of the members of the Artillery here in Launceston.

He will be sadly missed. - **LEST WE FORGET!**

El Alamein Day.

From this year 2007 onwards, as discussed, the anniversary of the Battle of El Alamein is to be celebrated on the actual day, regardless.

This year it will fall on Tuesday 23rd October - and, as usual, a group of northern R.A.A.T. members will make the journey to Hobart to join our comrades at the Domain Cenotaph for a service of Remembrance commencing at 11.00 a.m.

It is highly recommended that all Gunners – serving or non-serving, who can make the journey, do so – this is a very important anniversary in the Australian Military Forces WWII calendar that involved Tasmanian Artillery personnel.

The R.A.A.A.T. Secretary, Norm Andrews, is endeavouring to organise bus transport for those who are no longer able to make the trip under their own steam. If the transport is forth-coming, members and carers, where needed, must be at Paterson Barracks by 7.30 a.m. of the day so that the trip is not rushed. Obviously, there will only be limited number of bus seats available so contact Norm if you want to add your name to the list..

If able members can arrange small groups in private transport, it may be a good idea to save costs. Further details to follow in due course.

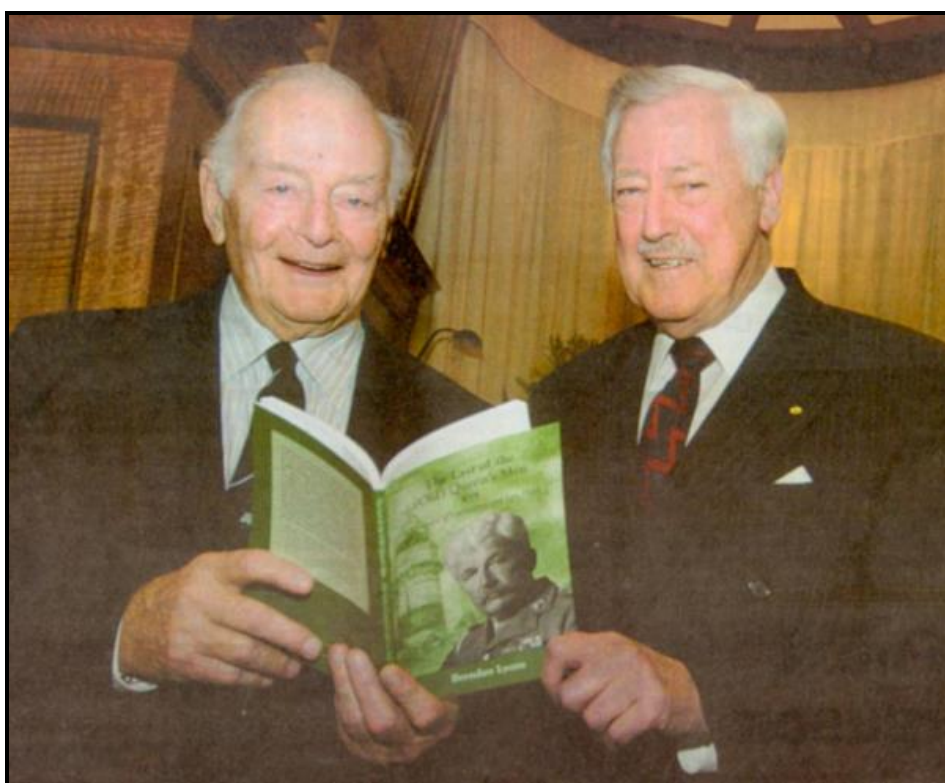
On Monday 3rd. September 2007, Governor William Cox launched a biography of the late John Gunn written by Mr. Brendan Lyons.

Entitled **“The Last of The (Old) Queen’s Men.”**, the book launch was at the Gunn’s family home ‘Claremont’ and was attended by a selected audience that included his surviving family as well as some of his fellow Gunners, of all ranks, who knew him during his time with the 6th Field Regiment R.A.A..

The book covers many aspects of John Gunn’s remarkable life including his rise from a lowly Gunner to Honorary Colonel Commandant of Artillery in Tasmania.

Copies of the book are available for those R.A.A.A.T. members who wish to obtain a copy – **Phone (03) 6344 9478** for details.

Price \$25 (paperback) and \$50 (library quality hardback)



Brendan Lyons and Governor William Cox at the book launch.

150th Anniversary Launceston Volunteer Artillery 2010.

As a matter of interest to our Historical Wing, our Secretary, Norm Andrews, has found copies of letters to and from Australia Post (*his letter dated 29 Oct 1985*)

and A.P's reply dated 7 Nov 1985) where he had asked for philatelic recognition for the Launceston Volunteer Artillery in the year 2010 when the LVA celebrates 150 years of service to the City of Launceston.

"We have noted the 150th anniversary of the Launceston Volunteer Artillery in 2010, and will give this matter further consideration at the appropriate time"

J.O. Monie for General Manager Marketing.
Australia Post HQ ,
PO Box 302, CARLTON SOUTH. VIC 3063.

SOCIAL NOTE – For those Gunners of all ranks who remember **Neil Whybrow** – he apologizes that, on a recent personal – *and very brief* – trip to Tasmania from Victoria, he and his wife didn't have time to catch up with all his old mates. He sends his best wishes.

LEST WE FORGET!

From time to time I get messages that arrive by email from ex-gunner friends and, whilst some are jokes and other general information, occasionally I receive one like this – and I pass them on with no obligation even if I cannot even vouch for the authenticity of the story - but the sentiments of the message should be dear to our hearts

From the daughter of a Soldier.

"Last week I was in Melbourne attending a conference. While I was in the airport, returning home, I heard several people behind me beginning to clap and cheer. I immediately turned around and witnessed one of the greatest acts of patriotism I have ever seen.

Moving through the terminal was a group of soldiers in their uniforms, as they began heading to their gate everyone (well almost everyone) was abruptly to their feet with their hands waving and cheering.

When I saw the soldiers, probably 30-40 of them, being applauded and cheered for, it hit me. I'm not alone.

I'm not the only red blooded Australian who still loves this country and supports our troops and their families. Of course I immediately stopped and began clapping for these young unsung heroes who are putting their lives on the line everyday for us so we can go to school, work, and enjoy our home without fear or reprisal.

Just when I thought I could not be more proud of my country or of our service men and women a young girl, not more than 6 or 7 years old, ran up to one of the male soldiers.

He knelt down and said "hi," the little girl then asked him if he would give something to her daddy for her.

The young soldier didn't look any older than maybe 22 himself, said he would try and what did she want to give to her daddy.

Suddenly the little girl grabbed the neck of this soldier, gave him the biggest hug she could muster and then kissed him on the cheek.

The mother of the little girl, who said her daughters name was Courtney, told the young soldier that her husband was a Corporal and had been in Afghanistan for 5 months now.

As the mum was explaining how much her daughter, Courtney, missed her father, the young soldier began to tear up.

When this temporarily single mum was done explaining her situation, all of the soldiers huddled together for a brief second.

Then one of the other servicemen pulled out a military looking walkie-talkie.

They started playing with the device and talking back and forth on it.

After about 10-15 seconds of this, the young soldier walked back over to Courtney, bent down and said this to her, "I spoke to your daddy and he told me to give this to you." He then hugged this little girl that he had just met and gave her a kiss on the cheek. He finished by saying "Your daddy told me to tell you that he loves you more than anything and he is coming home very soon."

The mum at this point was crying almost uncontrollably and as the young soldier stood to his feet he saluted Courtney and her mum.

I was standing no more than 6 feet away as this entire event unfolded.

As the soldiers began to leave, heading towards their gate, people resumed their applause. As I stood there applauding and looked around, there were very few dry eyes, including my own.

That young soldier in one last act of moment turned around and blew a kiss to Courtney with a tear rolling down his cheek.

We need to remember everyday all of our soldiers and their families and thank God for them and their sacrifices.

At the end of the day, it's good to be an Australian. "

The Artillery News.

Graeme E. Petterwood. (Editor).

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