

The annual journal of the 8th/7th Battalion, The Royal Victoria Regiment

The Ranger 2009



Kinglake Football Ground – Home to Rotation 3, Op Vic Fires Assist

Logan's Farm, Swan Hill, Mission Rehearsal for Ex Ypres in Mildura.



Ex Ypres VCP preparation, Mildura Airport



8/7 RVR:

Commanding Officer:
Lt Col D. W. Laidlaw CSC

Regimental Sergeant Major:
WO1 Brian Buskell

Honorary Colonel:
Prof David de Krestler AC
The Governor of Victoria

Regimental Colonel:
Brigadier Douglas Ball
AM RFD ADC

Allied Regiments:
3rd Battalion,
the Mercian Regiment
(The Staffords –
The Prince of Wales's) &
The Royal Regiment of
Canada

Ranger Editor,
Major Neil Leckie



RSM cutting his birthday cake and CO
Puckapunyal, May 2009



Ballarat CO & RSM, presenting promotion
certificates to Sergeant to Corporals
Bride and White of Geelong



Liaison Officers, Captains
John Spencer and Bill
Chapman, Kinglake

RANGER 2009

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Commanding Officer's Message (Lieutenant Colonel Doug Laidlaw)



Taking command of 8/7 RVR in January 2009 was a truly awesome moment. Having served in this unit as a platoon commander, company 2IC and company commander of A, B and Spt Coys, it was humbling to now return as CO.

From the outset of my handover briefs and Brigade induction it was obvious that LTCOL McKerral had matters in good order. Morale in the unit was the highest in the 4th Brigade. And so with this great start we commenced our year with the Induction Training weekend, 7th and 8th February 2009, a fateful day.

With very good numbers in attendance, I took the opportunity to outline my intentions for the unit – fundamentally we exist to train and prepare members to deploy and do our jobs. My expectations are that unit members will progress along a career that will see them be ready to render that service when needed, starting in the Reserve Response Force (RRF) and moving on the High Readiness Reserve (HRR). Beyond that, opportunities will exist with increasing frequency, for deployment to other operations.

On that day at Puckapunyal, the wet-bulb deployed to monitor heat read 49.6 ° C in the shade. Training was cancelled for the soldiers, who were knocked off from work to go and terrorise the locals at the pool (which they did). Officers and SNCOs got to enjoy a Military Appreciation Process (MAP) exercise conducted on the Battalion's training mission. By later in the afternoon, smoke was apparent from the Kilmore fires. A quick battalion parade was had in the smoke. Such information as was available on the CFA website was disseminated. A number of members indicated that their homes were threatened. These members were granted leave and made their way home. To their great credit, and my amazement, several returned the next day notwithstanding the ongoing threat or damage done.

From that the Battalion organised itself to provide rotations of personnel and command structures over a sustained period. Approximately 100 members ultimately deployed on Op Vic Fires Assist. These members provided great support and assurance to the affected community through their calm professionalism and caring engagement.

During the year we welcomed back those members having deployed on Op Anode Rotation 18. These officers and soldiers did the Battalion proud and it was pleasing to see many receive promotion upon return.

Training for the year progressed well with a great emphasis on continuation training to advance soldiers to ECN 343-2. The major training activities for the year were designed around a live field firing exercise conducted at Puckapunyal and culminating in a sustained tactical defensive shoot. The second major activity took the Battalion north the Swan Hill for battle preparation and then deploying to Mildura to conduct a security operation at the airport. Once again the enthusiastic performances of many in the scenario based training will no doubt draw comment elsewhere in this edition.

Typical of the highs and lows of service life, the Battalion had to grapple with resources challenges during 2009. By a lot of hard work and attention to detail, this unit was the first in the Brigade to come to grips with the new realities. Others followed our lead. I remain confident that into 2010 the unit will continue to train and prepare its members because of the planning that has been done.

In 2009 8/7 RVR demonstrated its ability to punch above its weight. The greatest contributions to the 4th Brigade RRF and HHR have by far come from this Battalion. My congratulations to all those who responded. In no short measure the unit was rewarded with additional resources on the basis of our higher command re-enforcing our success. It was also pleasing to see many of the very first HRR payments being administered so well. Some members reported their surprise that the \$10,000 turned up when it did. Well done all around!

2010 shapes up to be a great year in the history of the unit. The Battalion will deploy a company group on Op Anode. Training will be intensive and the preparation of this force the main effort for the year. We will also take all the opportunities that we can to secure additional training benefits for the unit generally.

I trust that you and your families have had an enjoyable extended stand down over Christmas. I look forward to the year ahead and the real challenges that it will bring to us all.

RSM (WO1 Brian Buskell)

Well, here we are, same time of year same Ranger, but a new RSM. I must start by thanking all members of the Battalion for helping me and my family to settle in to Ballarat over the last year.

I will now take you back to May 2008 when I was told of my appointment as RSM 8/7 RVR. Well I was surprised to say the least as 8/7 RVR was the Battalion that I had asked for and as you would all be aware we never get a posting we ask for. Once the initial shock had subsided I was very excited and proud to be appointed as your RSM; the Battalion has a very long and proud history and I feel very privileged to be a part of it.

My first impressions of the Battalion are positive ones; I am impressed with the dedication and motivation of the Officers, NCOs' and soldiers. Without doubt this is a very fine unit that punches well above its weight.

But let's talk about being an Infantryman, one of the hardest jobs in the ADF. The foundations of our trade are rock-solid individual skills in battle fitness, weapon handling, marksmanship, fieldcraft, and leadership. It's fine to say we are one of the oldest Infantry Battalions in the ADF, but how good are we at our trade? In my humble opinion our skills are good. This was highlighted during the Battalion LFX and AFX this year, but they could be better. We should also begin to look at other areas to improve such as our delivery of orders, and maintenance of Competency Log Books.

As I stated earlier, one of the core foundations of our trade is battle fitness. For most Battalion members you can only expect one period of PT a week. This is not enough it takes three to four PT sessions each week to maintain your fitness. This is only something the individual can work on; you need to develop your fitness in your own time to be Battle-fit. This is an ongoing requirement which has been highlighted by previous RSMs.

I have spent a lot of time this year asking the CSMs and Training Sergeants for your ideas and passing on information about Smart Soldier (Centre of Army Lessons Learnt) and Soldier's GIFT (Good Ideas for Training). Talking to the NCOs and soldiers of the Battalion I get the sense that some members are still not getting this information. If you don't believe you are getting sufficient information you must fight for it, step up regardless of rank. If you have a

way that we can train better or do our admin more effectively, talk to your chain of command or use the Smart Soldier web site at CALL.

Finally I would like to take this time to congratulate all those members of the Battalion that were promoted this year well done on your achievement. I wish you and your families all the best for Christmas and the New Year and I look forward to 2010.

XO (Major Neil Leckie)

As usual it has been a busy year for the XO. Like the remainder of the active members of the battalion, I was at Puckapunyal on 7th February when the 'state caught fire'. As a member of the CFA, I wasn't able to attend the fires, but a few days later I was able to do my bit as a member of the '3rd Rotation' with the Reserve. By the time we were on the ground, the task had changed to 'community engagement' where the soldiers were tasked with visiting as many properties as possible to engage with the property owners and find out where they were at with services etc, and advise them of what was available to assist them. A most rewarding task which enabled the members to see most areas of the fire (with the exception of Marysville).

At the last minute I attended the small town of Stuart Mill, near St Arnaud, as Guest Speaker for their ANZAC Day Service. It was an amazing couple of hours and makes you appreciate what is being done in the small communities around Australia, to ensure that the service of our men and women for our country is not forgotten.

Right: Maj Leckie with a couple of young lads at Stuart Mill.

In May I went overseas on a short 'working' holiday and visited the Staffords and the London Regiment in the UK. There is an article on that visit under our 'Affiliated Units'. On return I attended the Battle for Crete dinner (see also later article).



I attended the June 'live fire week' at Puckapunyal and spent my time sorting out the Non Public Monies Accounts (or Mess books). All NPMA are now using the same Cash Book/Audit Sheets spreadsheet which should help in future audits.

Exercise Ypres saw me take on the role of PR Officer. This involved ensuring newspaper articles were produced (working with Lt Perkins, the Brigade PRO, now based in Shepparton) and undertaking two radio interviews talking about the exercise and the Army Reserve in general. My views on the exercise are shown below in an article.

Finally, I participated in the Macarthur Street Primary School service at the 2/8th Battalion tree at the Shrine of Remembrance and the Remembrance Day Service at the school where the 2/8th Battalion is also honoured.

I hope all the battalion members have a good break over the Christmas/New Year period and come back refreshed and ready to take on the challenge of preparing for the Solomon Islands later in 2010.

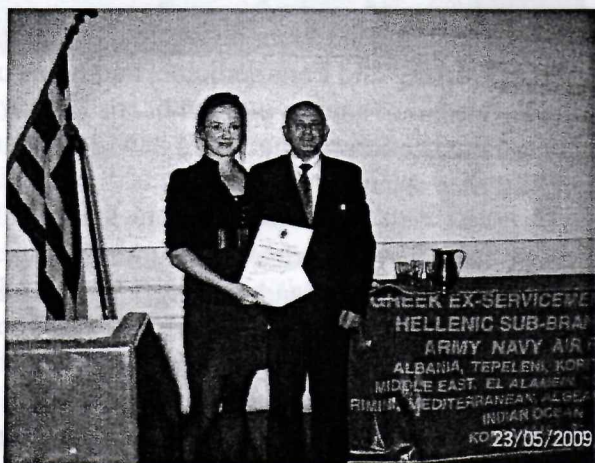
Battle for Crete Dinner

Two of the battalion's predecessor units, the 2/7th and 2/8th Battalions, fought in Crete in WW2. Each year, the Hellenic branch of the R&SL in Melbourne holds a commemoration of the Battle for Crete, and members on the two RVR battalions are invited to attend. This year the commemoration was held at the St Kilda Town Hall on 23rd May, 2009. Mr Tony Robinson, the Minister assisting the Premier on Veterans Affairs delivered the Premier's address. (In 2008, Mr Robinson's portfolio provided some funds to the Ballarat Ranger Military Museum to assist in its setting up prior to its opening).

I represented 8/7 RVR, while, LT COL Connelly the CO, represented 5/6 RVR.

The food was fantastic and the Hellenic population most welcoming to all the guests.

The main speaker for the evening was delivered by LTGEN Kalamatas – Hellenic Armed Forces, Consul General of Greece and representative of High Commissioner of Cyprus. The response was given by MAJGEN Barry (Ret'd) and there was a formal acknowledgement of Battle of Crete Veterans present.



Left: Mr Spiros Vardos OAM made the awards to the top Soldiers of the two RVR battalions and for 2008. By chance the awards went to a female Medic from each battalion. 8/7 RVR was represented by PRIVATE Erica Rosewarne.

A book launch was held for Mr Steve Kyritsis (3 RAR Vietnam), author of Experiences of Greek-Australian Vietnam Veterans, and an acknowledgement was made of the Veteran Veterans present.

OPS Cell

With Major Trevor McTernan overseas in The Solomons, the new Adjutant, Captain Mark Johnston, found himself on arrival in the 'hot seat' as the OPSO. WO2 Michael McLennan took over as Acting Adjutant. The OPS team over the year included WO2 Tom Hubbard (posted to MUR in 2010), WO2 Shane Armstrong, Sergeant Jim Skett (from Shoalwater Bay, Queensland) and Sapper Nathan Saunders (from 1 CER, Darwin). Captain Johnston was happy to hand over the reins to Major McTernan when he returned and went about learning his job as Adjutant. Having just got used to that seat, he is now working in the Op Anode Cell preparing the battalion members for deployment to The Solomons in August.

Orderly Room

Contrary to any rumours floating around, the Orderly Room is still manned primarily by military personnel (at least for the time being). Deanne Saunderson has moved up a pay grade after having had to go through the application process to retain her position.

Sergeant Dave Schafer left at the start of last year, and from latest reports is sunning himself in the Sinai and enjoying steins of beer at the German bar. Dave was replaced by Sergeant Ian Cust, so it was out with the old and in with the older! The Chief decided to throw Ian in the deep end, so he gave him free rein on the induction training weekend and let him sort out the Roll Books, incidentals and anything else he could palm off. He passed the test, and the Chief allowed him to take on the responsibility of Orderly Room Sergeant. Ian has dazzled us with his skill (on the soccer field), and has fine tuned the ability to listen attentively when the

Chief gives direction, and then go and do exactly the opposite. He has taken on a number of roles in the mess (bar member, social member and potential treasurer?)

Corporal Mick Durham, now Mick Gallo, was posted to 2 CDO REGT (was 4 RAR).

Corporal Sarah Hiller has stepped up to the movements clerk position and signed on for 2 years on a fixed period of service. She is very organised and efficient and handles the role without any difficulty. Sarah has also proved to be a bit of a goal sneak, and was instrumental in the UnSirs (SGs, CPLs and PTEs) defeating the Sirs (WOs and OFFRs) in our recent soccer tournament.

Corporal Jacky Grant was detached to Admin Coy at the start of the year, and Corporal Luke McGregor joined the Orderly Room team for 6 months. 'Macca' must be the most admin savvy RAInf soldier in the entire Defence Force. We tried to convince him to transfer to RAAOC as a clerk, but he insists he is a gunfighter first and foremost! Thanks, Macca, for all your help earlier in the year, and for your ongoing admin support from B Company.

Once we eased Macca out the door, we replaced him with the popular and polite Private Sophie Graham. 'Soph' is doing a double degree in Nursing and Paramedicine, and helps us out in the Orderly Room when she can find time between her studies and the hectic social requirements of a first year student. She also helped out the Recruiting Team in Mildura, and was very popular with potential male enlistees (like flies around a honey pot!)

Private Kerrie Saffron is doing a great job of single handedly inputting the pay for the Battalion, and has even been seen outside the office doing a BFA (and passing!) She is keen for any advice that might help her pass her LF1 shoot.

Sergeant Steve Linane has also signed on for a fixed period of service 'til the end of 2010. Being someone with a reputation for fitness, he was given the task of organising a nice, little team building session for unit PT. Four 'Mog' tyres, heaps of hills and some mud soon gave us all an excuse to get down and get physical. Steve's safety brief went in one ear and straight out the other as teams of four or five did whatever they could to win. 'Mog' tyres were rolled (out of control), pushed, carried and dragged around the 4 km course, with the RSM continually mumbling under his breath ('this was meant to be FUN!') The gym junkies (WO2s Armstrong, McKenzie, Hubbard) along with the Chief and WO2 McLennan were the winning team. WO2 McLennan was just able to keep up due to his high level of base fitness from his running training, but the Chief had to settle for the occasional glimpse of his team mates as they left him further and further behind. The Chief said it was a ploy to slow them down and give the others a chance to catch up, but I don't think anyone believed him. We believe you in the Orderly Room, Sir, 'cos you're our brave and fearless leader!

The Chief has had a good year, and is looking forward to at least one more in 2011. He's only half the man he was at the start of the year, and has lost a substantial amount of weight. He blames it on the imported Chinese chocolates we sell at the front counter (they're from Germany, Chief!), but we know it's due to the stress of managing his Orderly Room staff. The Chief has also had a chance to show off his soccer skills, and has proved adept at stopping goals getting past him. This will of course get harder and harder as he loses weight and can no longer block the net!

In between soccer, some PT and the occasional breakfast, we also deployed on EX Bobdubi at Pucka and EX Ypres in Mildura. When I say we, I mean Sergeant Cust! Keep up the good work, Custy, we're counting on you!

A Coy (WO2 Peter Daniels)

In 2009, A Company was ably lead by Captain Marcus Doherty with Captain Tavis Watt as his 2IC. WO2 Peter Daniels was the CSM and the CQMS was Sergeant David Nicholas. Training was under Sergeant Rodney Spong with Sergeant Dave Cave at Laverton. Sergeant Katrina Almond (who thoroughly enjoyed being a protester during Exercise Ypres in Mildura in September) looked after Recruiting. The Platoon Commander was Lieutenant Stuart Laws.



At Laverton Sergeant Ben Bounden was Depot Manager with Lieutenant Marcus Soawyer as Platoon Commander and Sergeant Ben Willmore was Depot Manager at Warrnambool. In 2010, Major Gareth Ward and captain Adam Runciman took charge of Company Headquarters.

Left: Captain Doherty with his new Lts, Laws and Soawyer after the Officer Graduation Ceremony at the Shrine in March.

The year 2009 started at a frenetic pace with the Battalion deploying to Puckapunyal for the beginning of the year induction/AIRN training with A Coy deploying with the rest of the Battalion on Friday 6th February. The Company settled down for an extremely hot, restless night. The following morning saw the cancellation of the BFA (due to the extreme heat that the area was experiencing) and we got on with the mandatory training briefs. By around lunchtime there was the smell of smoke in the air, and reports had started filtering down of a fire somewhere, and the possible need for some of the members of the company to go home to protect their families. The following day saw the call out of the RRF to help the civil agencies deal with what is now known to us all as the fires that destroyed so many properties and lives. A Companies rotation began on Friday the 13th Feb, with the deployment of many of its members including the OC and CSM. The images of the devastation and the suffering of the people are those that will remain with those who went for a very long time.

The next activity planned for the Company was a Sect attack demonstration, and recruiting stand at the Fort Queenscliff open day on the 14 March. The section, led by CPL Lynch, the recruiting stand led by CPL Almond and the CSM travelled to Fort Queenscliff for final rehearsals, the day began fine with plenty of sunshine and heaps of people, keen to see what was inside the ominous brick walls. Just before the displays were about to begin Queenscliff was struck by a mini cyclone and rain, the event was cancelled at the last minute, so we all drove back to Newland Barracks secured the weapons and decided what we would now do with our free Saturday.

The beginning of April saw the Coy deploy to Puckapunyal for Ex Marksmanship Quest. This was a Cat A live fire weekend including a MAG 58 course, with what looked like the whole Brigade's worth of 7.62mm and (for those who scored high enough on the LF6) the Applied Marksmanship Practice. This shoot was conducted to see who would qualify for the "crossed rifles" There was a few who came close including CPL Dinning, but unfortunately, no one could quite get over the line. On the Sunday LCPL Dvoracek was promoted to CPL by the CO and RSM, even if he did have his hands in his pockets when greeting the CO.

ANZAC day was the next activity in which A Coy had numerous moving parts to coordinate, including the following Catafalque parties and ceremonial activities:

1. The Dawn service at the Boer War memorial that is completely organised and conducted by A Coy every year, and which is the only dawn service in Geelong;
2. The ANZAC day march through the streets of Geelong, conducted by the entire Company, culminating in the ANZAC day service at Johnstone Park;
3. The 10:30 service at Ocean Grove organised by SGT Hardcastle; and
4. The 10:30 service at the Geelong RSL.

The day concluded back at Newland Barracks with an all ranks BBQ and function in the club.

It was at this stage that the CSM thought the year would begin to slow down, only to receive another request for support from the Geelong City Council. This time it was for the provision of soldiers to conduct a flag raising ceremony for the anniversary of East Timor Independence. With suitable soldiers selected and rehearsals conducted, including a meeting with the City Council, and the clearing up (by the CSM) of some flag protocol, the ceremony went off without a hitch and invited back to the council chambers for afternoon tea and speeches. The CSM gave a speech to all those gathered, recounting his memories of his first trip to the country during INTERFET, which proved a big, hit with all including the parliament members from the East Timor Government.

June saw the Coy deploy back to our beloved Puckapunyal for the Battalion's annual Live Fire Exercise (LFX). The activities conducted during the weekend were a Nav and First aid course for the unqualified soldiers. A SIO-S Mod 3 range qualification course, extensive 343-2 training for those who needed it, and a live fire Section Attack, and a Coy in Defence shoot which saw the soldiers dig-in to stage one and be subject to a number of scenarios devised by the training staff. The weekend was a complete success and the Battalion's number of 343-2 soldiers grew because of the training conducted.

September saw to Battalion AFX conducted at Swan Hill and Mildura. This training was once again geared towards 343-2 competencies, and low-level operations at a functioning facility. The Unit deployed to the Swan Hill depot for the beginning of the training and rehearsals. After the rehearsal stage at Swan Hill, the unit travelled by bus to the Mildura depot and slept on the football oval. Unfortunately no one turned off the sprinkler system, which automatically came on at midnight, much to the disgust of all those who did not choose an appropriate sleeping area. At approximately 0400hr, the Coy awoke (again) and prepared for the ten-kilometre route march to the Mildura Airport, with Key point security work tasks complete, the enemy was let loose to try and infiltrate, and damage the infrastructure only to be repelled by the successful conduct of the patrolling program.

The Company performed to an extremely high standard in 2009 with soldiers returning from OP ANODE, soldiers' deploying on OP VIC FIRE ASISST and the numerous training activities it was good to see the continuously high attendance at all parade activities. Lets hope that 2010 is just as good a year, but a little less busy (here's hoping).

The postings out from A Company were:

- a. CSM/TRG WO Sean (Tas)McGinley to A Coy 6 RAR;
- b. OC A Coy CAPT Marcus Doherty to MONUR; and
- c. CPL McKinley to 5/6 RVR on promotion to SGT

The postings into A Company were:

- a. OC A Coy MAJ G. Ward from 5/6 RVR;
- b. COY 2IC CAPT A. Runciman from 5/6 RVR
- c. CSM/TRG WO Peter (Jack) Daniels from 12/40 RTR; and
- d. SGT D. Mutsaerts from 5/6 RVR.

The promotions were:

1. PTE to LCPL:
 - (1) PTE M. Hutchins;
 - (2) PTE W. Petering;
 - (3) PTE A. Kent;
 - (4) PTE L. Cole;
 - (5) PTE J. Blain;
 - (6) PTE D Towers; and
 - (7) PTE B. Craske.

2. LCPL to CPL:
 - (1) LCPL R. Miller;
 - (2) LCPL B. Dvoracek; and
 - (3) LCPL M. Bayliss.

3. CPL to SGT:
 - (1) CPL K. Almond;
 - (2) CPL R. Charman;
 - (3) CPL J. White; and
 - (4) CPL E. Bride.

LFX MAY '09 (Lieutenant Stuart Laws)

The grand concept of the LFX (Live Fire Exercise) was of a variety of weapons exercises aimed at building well drilled, confident and above all safe riflemen. What we did was fit more solid and effective infantry training into this little nine day stretch than we had all year. The scheme of manoeuvre was five days in barracks training and revising, followed by a three day field phase

During revision we had plenty of opportunities to operate at Section strength – conducting IMT's, attacks, patrols, and the chance to practice section fire and target indication on live ranges both by day and night. We were also able to flex our muscles as a platoon, conducting day and night patrols, a live fire ambush, and a live fire Company Defence – and by defence of course we meant digging. Lots of digging.

As my first gig as a Platoon Commander in the field, I was impressed with the high standard of field craft and teamwork that got us through the week. NCO's in particular were impressive; they knew their roles, worked well with each other and above all loved the job they were doing. As a freshly minted Lieutenant the support I was given by my Section Commanders was invaluable, and allowed me to concentrate on doing the best job I could.

If I could sum up the LFX in one phrase, it would be 'maxed out'. Big blocks of Army time are essential training, especially for Reservists. Ultimately it was a great opportunity for us to get on our guts, make some noise and practice the job we've been trained to do – fight wars.

A selection of 2009 stories from Alpha Coy Geelong

The Wild Cat. (Private Alex McDonald)

Some of us are born mean and some are born keen. Old mate Private Emms fits into the latter category, with his keenness to use equipment for which he has no ROA reigning supreme. On a range weekend earlier in the year, this was no more evident than when Emmsy couldn't resist the urge to draw a Wild Cat sight from the armoury with his F88. He also couldn't take

the advice of a number of NCO's not to use it for his LF1. Undeterred by better advice or his lack of competency on the piece of kit Emms lay on the mound in front the OIC.

You don't know what you don't know, but at the end of the first serial Emms knew, however, that he did not know how to make the necessary adjustments to the sight. When he stuffed about on the mound, it became quite apparent to the OIC also (tip for young players: this isn't a good position to be in).

After his due arse chewing and subsequent remedial training Private Emms developed a level of competency with the sight and Private Wild Cat was born.

Civil Military Liaison duty and other croc shooting adventures in Solomon Islands. (Private Jeremy Tyzack)

As part of RAMSI, the combined task forces Civil Military Liaison unit regularly visited villages to get a feel for the issues that affect them, and organise village activities to support and help build relations with the RAMSI personnel. One such activity, often accompanied by Combat First Aiders from within the rifle company, involves running a weekly medical clinic.

Private Carmichael and Tyzack participated in a number of clinics, providing medical aid to villages on the outskirts of Honiara. Skin diseases, tuberculosis, arthritis all had to be dealt with, with the Task Force Medics always on-hand if the condition was beyond their means, providing an invaluable learning experience.

Since the Solomon Islanders relinquished their firearms under the peace deal they have been unable to defend themselves from the salt water crocodiles native to the region. As a result the Participating Police Force (PPF) conducts regular 'croc hunting' patrols primarily via boat to kill any crocodiles threatening the safety of the locals.

With LCorporal Watters providing interpretation and Private Tyzack, offering his medical support skills as a trained section Combat First Aider (CFA), the pair joined the PPF on one such patrol. Over a 24 hour period a number of villages on numerous islands where there had been reports of crocodiles hassling villagers were visited. Whilst no crocs were killed the locals were provided with the knowledge that RAMSI was always there to help. The pair heard many stories of kills involving crocs ranging from the "babies" of 2-3 metres to some 4 metre giants. Now Private Tyzack and LCorporal Watters also had their own story of "the one that got away".

SI Jungle Madness (Lance Corporal Craske)

What's this tension in the heart of nature? Why does nature vie with itself? The land contend with the sea? The night repel the dawn? A new day begins and our 2IC stands in front of me. Ten metres to our axis of advance. He stands on top of spot height 109, our final way point on our 8 hour patrol. The morning is still dark but the sun threatened to burst up from behind the peaceful horizon. Golden rays and dark red streaks begin penetrating the sky to the east and our 2IC alone, standing just before the steep cliff, plots our current grid with his GPS.

Dawn is finally upon us and the glowing shape of the morning sun begins to slide its way from up behind the horizon. Bathed in blinding sun light, our 2IC does not flinch. He turns to us and for the first time since the patrol stepped off, he sees our faces. Illuminated by the rising sun he looks upon the men. He saw tired and exhausted faces, yet their spirits were still high. "I got it." he paused. 'Let's move!' Mounting the vehicle, the engine of the IIMV kicked over and the turbo began to wind up.

'Prepare to copy,' our 2IC gestured toward the soldier sitting next to him. It was all by the numbers and our section was well drilled. 'Send it.' came the reply from our Sig. It had been a long night and an even longer day prior to the orders we had received before stepping off. Training and rehearsals. We are well prepared.

'In this world, can one man, in this time, make a difference? We work long and hard to make it become a reality for the beneficiaries of our efforts. One day, but not this day, this tiny fraction of the world will once again find it's peace.'

B Coy

While not the biggest rifle company in the battalion, B Company, spread between Ballarat and Monegeetta, laid claim to having the best AIRN Statistics in the battalion in 2009. Led by Captain Strack, the 40 or so Ballarat members were joined by the growing number of Monegeetta members (now 20 strong). WO2 Pete McGechan joined the battalion as CSM. The CSM lives at Heathcote and uses Bendigo as a home base, but parades at Monegeetta on Tuesdays. Ballarat staff were: Lieutenant Dave Wait (now inactive) and Sergeant Brett Stephenson (recently promoted to WO2), Corporals Luke McGregor, Sean Fitton and Dan Purcell. Rob Powell and Nick Boak were both promoted to Lance Corporal on return from the Solomons, where B Company had 13 members serving. Monegeetta staff were Lieutenant David Greentree, Corporals , Brad Watkins, Craig Byrne and Santo Tarquinio and Lance Corporal Justin Mahoney.

2010 sees Captain John Spencer as OC, Captain Paul O'Donnell (promoted on return from The Solomons) as 2IC, WO2 McGechan as Training WO/Depot Manager Monegeetta, and WO2 Stephenson as CSM.

C Coy (Captain Oladele, 2IC C Coy)

C Company must be one of the most spread out rifle companies in the Army Reserve! 2009 saw the OC, Captain Bill Chapman in Mildura, the 2IC, Captain Vincent Oladele in Shepparton and the CSM, WO2 Jason Clegg in Bendigo. WO2 Clegg transferred to the AUR early in the year and was replaced by WO2 Michael Greenwood. Michael just got in the job and he found himself heading overseas for a stint on a Training Exchange with the United States Marine Corps. Sergeant Steve Ivey was in Swan Hill for a while, but is now back as Depot Manager in Mildura. Swan Hill has the now Sergeant David Logan as the Depot Manager and Sergeant Shane Potter looks after Shepparton. In 2009 the CQMS was Sergeant Jason Waldren, but in 2010 he transferred to 7 RAR in Darwin and has been replaced by Sergeant Mark Bell.

The year started for C Company in February very fiery (...I mean literarily "Fire!"). The bushfire in Victoria was raging, while we were having our Induction Training at Puckapunyal. It was an event that defined the year for Victoria and indeed for C Company. The Induction program was an opportunity to get to meet the new Commanding Officer and his team.

C Company had a large footprint as part of the OP VIC FIRE ASSIST in Kinglake as the OC and the 2IC along with our diggers were very active during the one week stint in Kinglake and the other areas affected by the Fire. I was at the OPS HQ where I had the opportunity of meeting the former Victoria Police Commissioner Christine Nixon.

The year then moved to ANZAC Day which was well attended by members of the Shepparton Depot in both Shepparton and Mooroopna. The Catafalque Party was well drilled and equal to the task. It was an exercise that was carried out effortlessly and well appreciated by the locals especially the RSL members.

The year also saw C Company losing some of its fine soldiers either to the Inactive Reserve, the ARA, posted to other units or simply joined the Police. These include Lieutenant Clancy, Sergeant Lynch, Lance Corporal Wright and Private Connor to mention but a few.

Those promoted include; Sergeant Lynch to WO2, Lance Corporal Moore to Corporal, Corporal Logan to Sergeant and Privates Wright and Baker to Lance Corporal.



The year then rolled on in dribs and drabs with CSM reign passing from WO2 Reyne to WO2 Greenwood (...the gentle giant). The posting of Sergeant Potter into the C Company's Shepparton Depot was a welcome relief as the Depot was without full time personnel in the period following the posting of WO2 Lynch to Canberra Sergeant Potter's posting to Shepparton Depot has seen few changes made and his wealth of experience has been very evident in his ability to impact his experience to the junior soldiers. He is currently

acting CSM in the absence of WO2 Greenwood whom I believe is having fun in Obama down town USA.

The main effort for the year was then focused on Ex Ypres, the September low level ops Battalion activity in Swan Hill and Mildura. Training was conducted focusing on weapon handlings, Vehicle Check Points (VCP) and Vital Asset Protection (VAP).

C Company provided the platform for the exercise through the OC of C Company providing his airport for the training area in Mildura. This allowed the Battalion an opportunity where our freedom of action is almost unchallenged in terms of testing our training requirements and acting out our theory lessons.

Ex Ypres started with Sub Unit Training (SUT) theory lessons in weapon handlings, intelligence, VAP, VCPs and WTTS to finish with prior to deploying to the Area of Operations.

D-Day was September 12 with pre-deployment commencing in Swan Hill Barracks followed by OC A Company leading the pack with C Company 2IC assisting him. Both the pre-deployment and deployment went smoothly with the highlight been the soldiers getting drenched at midnight while trying to catch a few hours sleep from the Mildura football oval's sprinkler system. Was this part of the exercise?

The 12km route march into the Area of Operations (the airport) tested some of the soldiers to their limit, but relief came from a rather unusual circumstance.....the safety vehicle lost its safety headlight plunging the pack march into total darkness and slowing down the march until it came to a grinding halt.

Ex Ypres gave C Company soldiers great opportunity to shake out and to further cement their theory lessons on low level ops especially in the area of VAPs and VCPs. Weapon handling

and tactical drills were also tested and I have no doubt the soldiers benefitted a great deal from the Exercise.

Admin Coy (Mark Broemmer, WO2, CSM)

The year started with a new command team with Major Cliff Gowers returning to the unit as OC ADMIN, Captain Watt as 2IC and WO2 Peter Malone making a return to the unit as the Company Sergeant Major (ARA). Major Peter Worsteling has completed his tour of duty overseas and we wish him well in the future.

Like all members of 8/7 RVR, the members of Admin Coy were expecting a quiet year when the calendar rolled over into 2009. February the seventh, was a day when many of us were at Puckapunyal, sweltering through one of the hottest days many of us had ever experienced. The days following were a rollercoaster of emotions when the drama and full horror of Black Saturday came to light. With the recovery came the ADF response with many of the members of the RRF becoming the first Army personnel on the scene. Unit members like CORPORAL Bruce Wilson and Corporal Michael Currie heading up sections on the ground in the gruesome task of house to house searches and location identification.

WO2 Malone spent many hours contacting members of the unit to assist in 'Operation Vic Fires Assist' as part of Joint Task Force 662 with at least 65% of Admin Coy members serving as part of the JTF. Company Clerk Corporal Jacky Grant was also kept extremely busy with Administrative tasks with many of the unit members being rotated through JTF 662 in 6 day 'tours'.

Such was the scene throughout Admin Coy and the unit in general up until the 16th of March when the ADF level of involvement was scaled down to allow the civilian population return to some semblance of normality. Around this time the focus of the unit changed toward preparing for ANZAC Day and again the Company provided a Catafalque Party for Sebastopol and Buninyong RSL ANZAC Day ceremonies. Many thanks to Corporal Hooper and his team, for upholding the standards of the Company and the Battalion.

The mid-year came around soon enough with a deployment to Puckapunyal for a week of ranges and unit training. The Catering Platoon used field equipment within the National Service Lines Kitchen/Mess Hall. Sergeant Walden and the Q Team providing support for all of the daily requirements of the exercise. WO1 Griggs as the 'Camp Commandant' was kept busy within the confines of the HQ building.

September saw the battalion exercise in the North-Western part of Victoria starting at Swan Hill and culminating with asset protection centering on the Mildura Airport. Admin company personnel providing great support for this exercise in all of the usual areas including Catering, Transport, Medical and Logistics.

The Company enjoys great administrative support from Corporal Jacky Grant and we have also welcomed back WO1 Greg Green as our new second-in-command. There are quite a number of 'new faces' around Admin Coy and I look forward to meeting all of you at some stage during 2010.

I urge all members of the company to confirm their training commitment to the battalion throughout 2010; maintain and aim to improve their AIRN status and look to the future as more and more opportunities will become available. Those members that have volunteered for OP Anode should now soon if they are accepted and training can begin in earnest. There will be more opportunities arising in 2010 and beyond for Op postings.

I march into the position of CSM Admin with a long history of support to this battalion and I look forward to working with all members of the Company in our quest to provide quality assistance to the Battalion, the Fourth Brigade and the Australian Army in general.

QM PI

Another year has gone and the New Year is in full swing.

As with the start of every year we farewell the old and welcomed the new and this year was no exception. The outgoing numbers this year are at the bare minimum, we all pass on our congratulations to Trevor Hooper who went off to Sunny BrisVegas to pass on his extensive knowledge to 21 Const Regt with his new shiny rank of Sergeant. We hope you had a good Christmas Trevor and we all hope that you excel in your new posting. The huge gap left by Trevor will be filled by Lance Corporal Tuck, whom we also welcome to 8/7 and trust that he will enjoy his time in the Battalion.

Luckily we will be maintaining continuity next year with everyone else remaining in the Battalion. The QM WO1 Martin Griggs has thoroughly enjoyed his first year at the helm and is looking forward to guiding the Battalion through the often murky waters of logistics.

WO2 Darren McKenzie has settled in well since becoming landed gentry with his property out Haddon way and has ensured that the Main Q has ran efficiently with is guidance and leadership throughout the year.

Corporal Darren Brown has fitted in very well within the team and is enjoying the Ballarat lifestyle a great deal, we all wish to congratulate him and his lovely wife once again on the addition to their family and wish them all a prosperous New Year.

Often overlooked and usually an unappreciated area of human endeavour are our part time members. We are fortunate to have these people who do provide a viable asset to the Battalion, to Private Shane Watson, Private Peter Brewer and by no means least Private Jake Miocic. We look forward to you returning and continuing your efforts this year.

Although not actually posted to QM PL, we all would like to congratulate Lance Corporal Matthew Hutchins on is outstanding achievements and the recognition he has received, Well Done Matt.

To the rest of the members of the Battalion, the QM PL wish all a safe and prosperous New Year and look forward to seeing all the faces back at the start of the training year.

Catering (Mark Broemmer, WO2, Warrant Officer Caterer)

At the beginning of 2009 we were steeling ourselves for a reasonably quiet year. Little did we know that an event was looming that would change many lives... forever.

The members of the Battalion who were attending the induction training weekend at Puckapunyal on the 7th and 8th of February slowly learnt about the huge human tragedy that was unfolding throughout various parts of Victoria. Members of the RRF (many of them catering Platoon members) were on standby as we departed for home locations on that fateful Sunday afternoon. As the gravity of the situation grew, those members of Catering platoon (RRF members) swung into action and were deployed to the worst affected fire areas such as Kinglake, Kinglake West, Flowerdale and Marysville to assist with search tasks.

Joint Task Force 662 and 'Operation Vic Fires Assist' were born. Members of the 8/7 RVR Catering Platoon initially assisted within their role as 'Search' teams and eventually reverted into groups to conduct the important task of feeding hundreds of displaced persons, Emergency Service personnel and ADF members. I am extremely proud of the way in which the members of the Catering team threw themselves into the task of feeding so many people, usually with sub-standard equipment and as always, undermanned. Army Reserve members working side by side, with their ARA counterparts, with the single goal of community well-being as their primary focus. The standard of work achieved by our members during this challenging time is the stuff legends are made of.....



Left: The real 'Hell's Kitchen' at Marysville with the destroyed Marysville Primary School in the background.

4CSSB were tasked with providing a Field Kitchen at Marysville. This was immediately dubbed 'Hell's Kitchen' and the eerie backdrop of the almost deserted, fire ravaged town of Marysville was in need of our help and help we did. Nearly all members of the 8/7 RVR Catering Team were rotated through 'Hell's Kitchen' over a one month period, assisting our colleagues at 4CSSB and Sergeant Craig Bearman who, somehow, managed to acquire some of the more basic 'necessities' of a bush-camp environment making life that little bit more bearable. The experiences gained will be remembered forever.



Left: Private Alex Muscat with the destroyed Marysville Recreation Reserve grandstand in the background.

Corporal Bruce Wilson was invited back to Marysville in late April for ANZAC Day and was treated to a grand share of the local's hospitality as a token of their appreciation and goodwill.

In late June, we deployed to the National Service Lines at Pucka (some of us oldies knew it as O.R. Training Wing or 'O' Block) for a range week. A great opportunity to work on basic field equipment. This increased the experiences of the younger members of the platoon. One of the members who may have benefitted by the experience was injured during the 'set-up' phase and spent the week at Puckapunyal Medical Centre. Private Alex Muscat is still recovering. Many of the unit members commented on the quality and quantity of the meals provided.

A further deployment exercise at Swan Hill and Mildura in September saw a smaller number of Catering Team members provide support to the Battalion. SERGEANT Steve Ivey, Corporal Mick Mallows, Corporal Bruce Wilson and Private Jodie Pitt heading up that team. Again, the meals enjoyed by the unit members were well above the national standard.

The Catering Team at 8/7 RVR is a close knit group, almost a family extension, we have striven to provide the best culinary support to our own unit, sister-units within Victoria and to the wider Victorian community. We do what we can, with what we have, to the limits of everyone's abilities and within the allowed time constraints and I know we do it reasonably well. It is time for me to move on to a new position as CSM ADMIN COY and I know that I leave the Catering Platoon in the very capable hands of Sergeant Steve Ivey (currently CFTS Depot manager of Mildura and Swan Hill depots).

He is ably assisted by Corporal Bruce Wilson (living legend), Corporal Mick Mallows (new 'kid' on the block from 15TPT Bendigo), Corporal Michael Currie (photographer extraordinaire), Private Mathew Gellert (Ballarat), Private Jodie Pitt (Warrnambool), Private Luke Winter (Ballarat) and Private Alex Muscat (Ballarat). Sadly, we are to lose Private Simon Gellert (Ballarat) due to his impending move to Sydney to complete his chosen calling as a Minister. (He is a great tradie (chippie), a great cook and I dare say going to be great 'man of the cloth') We wish him all the best. We are also losing Private Emma Curran due to work commitments within the racing industry. We wish Emma well and dearly hope that she continues to ride the horses, not the other way around.

During 2009, the Catering Team also drew on the vast experience and knowledge of the 'CSM ADMIN COY/TRG WO' WO2 Peter Malone (ARA). Peter was welcomed back to the unit having previously served as a CORPORAL Cook in the 1990's. Peter is a stalwart of the Australian Army Catering Corps. WO2 Malone leaves the unit on posting to a preferred warmer climate of Brisbane in 2010. We wish him well in the future.

2010 will bring some new faces and some great new challenges. Wherever you find members of this Battalion you'll find members of the Catering Platoon there in the thick of it.

We sustain!

Major Activities Bushfire Support

Victoria Police Statement: Australian Defence Force Join Police Operation

9 February 2009

The Australian Defence Force has joined with Victoria Police to start a search of the areas badly affected by the bushfires.

Its role is to identify what infrastructure has been destroyed and to make contact with people living in the areas and ascertain if they have any information about family and friends who they believe had been in the area at the time of the fires. The squads will include police, CFA and ADF personnel.

Defence personnel are making their way to the Kilmore, St Andrews, Yarra Glen and Traralgon.

Search & Rescue unit is co-ordinating the search with regional police members who have local knowledge as many street signs and key landmarks have been destroyed.

The searches will take place during daylight hours and is due to commence this afternoon and will begin again at daybreak.

Bushfire Summary (Army, 16th April 2009)

ADF contribution to the Black Saturday bushfire relief effort in Victoria ended on March 31 with the closure of JTF 662 after seven weeks of operation. At its height, about 850 troops were assigned to the taskforce to support emergency-management workers and affected communities. During the response, soldiers searched more than 120 sq km of fire-affected area, including more than 1,300 homes. Engineer plant operators cut more than 110km of fire-containment lines, while chain-saw teams cleared more than 35km of roads and a 20m protective firebreak around four Aboriginal art sites north of Myrtleford. While the ADF will maintain a small specialist forensic contribution to the Victorian Coroner until mid-2009, all other contributions have ceased.

Reconstruction authority head Christine Nixon said the recovery was now well under way with federal and state funding recently allocated for the clean-up of affected areas. She said 2,000 of the 4,000 people and properties believed to be entitled to clean-up assistance had registered for support. Ms Nixon said the range of ADF skills and its capacity to deploy large numbers of troops was a significant part of the successful response.

“It was a great job and a great partnership and [the ADF] made the response just so much more effective,” Ms Nixon said. “I know communities felt safe and comfortable having them around.”

Ms Nixon said community respect for the ADF also played an important early role in its assistance to the police when a calm and stable response was needed most. “That is the point I made – I said, ‘I’m not exactly sure what we are tasking you on, but go out there and literally drive up driveways and say ‘how are you going’. That is in some sense a policing response but I think it is something the ADF did really well.”

Commander JTF 662 Brig Michael Arnold said it had been a rewarding and moving experience, particularly for Victorian reservists. “They dedicate a portion of their lives to serving the nation and for many there will be no more important task in their Defence careers than being part of the various uniformed organisations that came to the aid of fire-devastated communities,” Brig Arnold said.

Defence support included direct assistance in the fire-containment effort with engineer teams and aerial fire spotting. Soldiers also provided emergency living facilities for displaced communities and emergency services in isolated areas such as Marysville and assisted police in the demanding task of searching fire-ravaged properties.

Ms Nixon also made special mention of military chefs who staffed field kitchens for emergency services and local communities. “The Army chefs became quite famous, particularly in Marysville, and they were involved in feeding a lot of people.”

Many battalion members assisted in Op Vic Fires Assist. A number of articles in this year’s magazine include information on the battalion’s role.

Rotation 18, The Solomon Islands: 3 PLATOON (Lieutenant Paul O'Donnell) from Pacific ANZAC 4

Rapidly 3PL swung into action, and within 60 minutes we had acquired vehicles, stores, received and given orders. We were off. Arriving at Yea we were the first soldiers deployed on the ground for OP VIC FIRES ASSIST. We established ourselves, proceeded to set up and within 20 minutes the first tents were up. Although our overall efforts paled into significance with the harrowing tales from locals, the displaced families were genuinely relieved to see the Army. The men acquitted themselves well refusing to take rest and only pausing for a quick drink or biscuit; using the break to listen to the heartbreaking stories from the locals.

Hours later, once our task had been completed, the men turned their initiative to the dozens of restless children at the refugee camp. They rounded up sports equipment and games of cricket, football and soccer were established while other soldiers sat and listened to those who had lost everything. It was a positive and rewarding experience for all.

Although only a two days young, 3 Platoon was blooded with its first task. This experience alone proved we could trust one another and perform to a high standard even before we had received our first pre-deployment training lesson. The tone was set for success and assisted us in having a grounded and positive attitude to how we conducted our preparation training for Op Anode.

We deployed once more as part of OP VIC FIRES ASSIST. Although from a military perspective we still achieved the task set out for us, it was a lesson in poor communications and the negative effects it can have. This was noticed at Kinglake when we arrived with tents, stretchers and bedding only to learn that our presence wasn't expected and the resulting hours of waiting for a clear decision saw the soldiers were putting up the tents in poor light.

Op ANODE training commenced and completing the required training became uppermost in our minds. Initially it was planned that 5/6 RVR would lead the training for the CTF however as a result of their support to the bush fires this did not eventuate. In what was to become the theme of the pre-deployment, the soldiers adapted to the new situation at short notice, took the initiative and began running the training program ourselves with guidance from the company staff.

The result was early starts, long days and nights for the next month to ensure all was in order for the next day, together with ensuring outstanding administration issues were rectified in a timely manner. The barracks environment of Puckapunyal, and limited social activities, ensured the men got to know each other extremely well and highlighted potential friction which section commanders and PHQ were able to resolve quickly and without issue. The five days leave granted in the middle of pre-deployment training was a good opportunity for soldiers to return home and spend time with family, while I'm sure some took the time to enjoy a few beverages. On Friday March 6th Private Nick Bond had his engagement party at GC's Sturt Street Ballarat for his upcoming wedding to Melissa. Private Rawson is also engaged to his fiancée Stephanie who will be holding their engagement party on return home.

After the break, we journeyed north to conduct acclimatisation and Helicopter Underwater Escape Training (HUET). Travelling through New South Wales' green mountain ranges and lush fertile valleys was a harsh reminder with the drought affecting many within the Platoon. The devastation of Victoria's bushfires made it almost unbelievable that such places full of life still existed within Australia's borders. It had a soothing effect through the hope it brought with it. HUET was challenging and enjoyable for all. For all of us who had ever considered what it was like to be a piece of clothing in a washing machine, our wait was over.

Blindfolded with black-out goggles in a mechanical helicopter simulation system, the soldiers were then dunked and spun around before having to escape upside-down in the water. It was a buzz.

We then travelled to Canungra, in the Gold Coast hinterland, to refresh basic jungle skills and, more importantly, get familiarised with the operational environment we were about to deploy into. Unfortunately the time there was limited to a weekend making it difficult to get the full benefit. 3 Platoon achieved a good result and completed all the tasks before returning to Puckapunyal for the Mission Rehearsal Exercise which assessed the CTF ready to go.

Landing in country was a magical and satisfying experience for all. Being part of the advance party it was a good opportunity to speak to members already here and liaise with the Platoon Commanders of Rotation 17. Listening to their experiences rounded out the expectations that I had prior to deploying. This highlighted for me the fact that the trip could either be fantastic or disappointing depending on command decisions and most importantly good man management. It was a truly rewarding feeling to watch the men of 3 PL emerge from a C130 Hercules a few days later. The strong and determined looks of some compared to the excited looks of others, knowing they were serving their country, instantly justified the numerous exercises they had been on over the years and reinforced my conviction this trip would be what we made it.

Our first task in the rotation was security for FOB Maritime. This involved one section providing security at the entrance, providing patrols and conducting the administration for the Company HQ. The administration side of the house involved a significant amount of small chores that needed to be conducted each day around the clock. It wasn't strenuous work but was consistent. The men enjoyed their week of duties immensely and had a far easier task for the remaining two weeks in the rotation. They spent one week as a patrol section and the final as the training section. In saying that, each section was committed to two patrols every three days. This ensured a good and thorough understanding of the operating area and the other agencies working under the RAMSI banner.

The next rotation was also a rewarding one. With the Platoon still located at FOB Maritime, the duties had been handed over to the Pacific Island Contingent (PIC) Platoon, namely a PNG Platoon from 1 Royal Pacific Islands Regiment (RPIR) lead by Lieutenant Adolf Kaien. A funny and interesting group of soldiers, their presence made for a relaxed environment at FOB Maritime. With one section at the Rove OP, the other two continued their patrols and training. The pace was good with enough work to keep soldiers busy without becoming bored or uninterested. The Rove OP is one of the more interesting and enjoyable rotations for sections and section commanders due to its isolation and independence - their own section and their own OP. All sections enjoyed their time at Rove and looked for additional opportunities to reside there.

The PNG soldiers have a different way of looking at life and their presence was a great opportunity for the soldiers to learn from another culture; in this case: butchering. 3 and 4PL (PNG) conducted a combined personal development training session which involved the slaughtering and cooking of a pig. This was designed to make sections more knowledgeable about identifying healthy animals and knowing how to carry out safe and correct slaughter. This would prevent medical illness associated with consuming unsafe or poorly-prepared food in preparation for provincial patrols where food would be obtained locally.

The training was a great success, all members gained confidence and the understanding that meat doesn't come from behind the windows at the butcher. After an enjoyable six weeks at

FOB Maritime it was time to move to GBR. Moving had benefits and disadvantages, either suited us just fine and the diggers were looking forward to having a running track for a change. Other benefits of GBR included air - conditioned accommodation lines called ITSAs that were free from cane toads and mosquitoes as well as the benefits of metal cutlery and a fully-serviceable gym. Overall it was win-win for everyone... except PRIVATE Christopher Giang who would have less opportunity to fish from Maritime's pier.

Like all good plans everything changes at the last minute. The training program set in place for the three weeks of our rotation as Training Platoon was scrapped on day one. This was as a result of operational tasks of the other platoons. It was good for 3 PL as the men of 9 Section had the opportunity to spend a week at Tetera while 7 & 8 spent most of their time conducting provincial patrols, so in essence we became another provincial platoon.

Marksmanship training has continued with a progression from static shooting to field firing. The platoon has been field firing once a week; this has been an excellent experience for a couple of reasons. Generally there is only limited opportunity to conduct field firing ranges within a Reserve unit, compounded by a lack of experienced safety staff. We have taken the opportunity, developing the men's skill and confidence which comes with firing live rounds. Our practices have incorporated assaulting, fighting withdrawals, ambushing and casualty recovery to name a few.

Our next stint, as QRF, was quite enjoyable. A regular routine with flexibility in our training ensured an opportunity to round out training shortfalls for individual soldiers as well as preparing them for their promotion courses with a focus on development on leadership and instructional abilities.

Provincial platoon was a continuation of duties we were well used to by now. Patrol bases in the villages and a variety of other patrol tasks ensured a productive period that flew by. Before we knew it we had arrived at our last and most rewarding rotation. Each section had individual tasks with the highlight being 8 Section's nine day patrol along the Weather Coast.

So that is where we have come from and where we are now. The most important thing for us now is the way forward: maintaining our current standards, finishing the job and preparing the men for a solid and positive transition back to civilian life, and in most cases, reality. This will occur with ensuring solid administration to enable a clean transition as well conventional training for all soldiers, keeping their basic skills and minds sharp. Guidance from the financial advisor will also be a key component for the younger soldiers and finally reminding them of social skills, cutting back on cursing and other soldierly behaviour so as not to shock family members who may not have seen them for quite some time.



Left: Welcome Home Parade at the Shrine in Melbourne

3 Platoon A Company Combined Task Force 635 is comprised of men from all walks of life: farmers, tradesmen, teachers, students, accountants, rogues, fathers and sons, men of all ages from both the city and country. These are the men I was gifted with and I thank them, their families and friends for the sacrifices and hard work they have contributed since Christmas knowing that they have made a difference and positively

contributed to RAMSI and the community of the Solomon Islands. I can sincerely say their honour is steadfast and these well-rounded Australians reinforce the privilege that comes with command.

Exercise 'Boss Lift', Solomon Islands, Rotation 18 Solomon Islands

(Linda DeBoer (from Defence Family Matters))

Linda DeBoer, Defence Transition Mentor at Golden Grove Secondary Schools Campus in South Australia, recently travelled to the Solomon Islands as a part of the Boss Lift - a Defence program designed to encourage employer support to Reservists. Read on to discover how some well needed support to a Solomon Islands' school evolved ...

Visit the Solomon Islands? Wow, I didn't expect that to happen! Where are they? ... All these thoughts darted through my brain. My role as a Defence Transition Mentor is always interesting and has unusual aspects to it, which is what I love about my job; but the opportunity to visit our Middle School Co-ordinator, Mr. Mike Meredith – who in his other life is an Army Reservist – was awesome and totally unexpected!

Mike would do the leg work in identifying a school that could benefit from our support, and also establish what would be the most useful items to purchase and send.

Let me back track a little here last year, in term three, Mike and I were discussing the possibility of supporting a school in the Solomons, mostly because Mike was deploying for four months with OPERATION ANODE, the ADF's contribution to the Regional Assistance Mission to the Solomon Islands (RAMSI). Mike would do the leg work in identifying a school that could benefit from our support, and also establish what would be the most useful items to purchase and send. The State Manager of Defence Reserves Support at the time, Major Antony Simcock, had lived with his family in the Solomon Islands and he was very keen on encouraging such an association; plus he was able to help with the arranging of shipping the goods to the islands. Transportation has always been the challenge whenever I have considered similar projects for a developing country.

We jumped at the opportunity at Golden Grove High School. We were very enthusiastic about getting involved in a community project, and the chance to involve our students in extending themselves to help others. We began fundraising in earnest in term one of this year by selling ice blocks during the extremely hot weather that Adelaide was enduring at the time. We couldn't freeze the ice blocks quick enough! After speaking at assemblies and drawing the students into what we were doing, the support we had was fantastic. I thought it would be a good idea to have a small committee of students to help with some of the leg work, and decided to give my Defence students the first opportunity to be on this committee. The response was excellent, and this little group is made up predominantly of Defence students. We were very happy with the \$660 raised in a couple of weeks of selling.

We had decided to dedicate one of our 'casual days' to this project, so we did more public relations to promote what we were doing, and involved the Student Voice Home Group who also gave us lots of support. Around this time the tragic news of the Victorian bushfires was very much in the minds of Australians, so we decided as a school to split the proceeds of this fund raiser. We raised much more money than we usually do at these events, as our school community embraced our aim to support our two major projects.

Meanwhile, Mike's visit to Bishop Epalle School identified sporting equipment and school supplies as the top priorities. We were advised not to send money, as goods are not readily available in the Solomons. We approached IDM Sports and Office Max, companies that

supply the school with equipment, and were thrilled that both of these companies were extremely supportive, either donating goods or giving us significant discounts. We made our orders and the goods were delivered just in time for the date that the Principal, Mr Mal Kemp and I began our adventure to the Solomon Islands.

As part of Boss Lift and together with other people from Adelaide, Tasmania, Perth and Sydney who also had Reservists deployed to the Solomon Islands, we converged on a hotel in Brisbane to start our exciting journey to Honiara. Accompanying us on the flight were the nine boxes - 124kg – of supplies for Bishop Epalle School! We had sports equipment galore, balls of all different shapes and sizes; pumps, whistles, exercise books, pens, coloured pencils...the support from our sponsoring companies was fantastic.

For me, it was amazing to actually observe what a deployment looks like, and I valued this experience which will most certainly help me when chatting to the many Defence students at the schools I work at.

The Reserve and Employer Support Division provided an excellent overview of the various activities that the Reservists are involved in and highlighted the important role the Reserves play in the ADF. We were able to see and experience so much of what their life had been like over the past three months or so. We saw where the soldiers live, demonstrations of a patrol, learned about the 'hearts and minds' campaign and lots more. I particularly enjoyed seeing how the soldiers interacted with the local villagers, and their mutual sense of acceptance was clearly evident. For me, it was amazing to actually observe what a deployment looks like, and I valued this experience which will most certainly help me when chatting to the many Defence students at the schools I work at. We were thrilled when the complete group was scheduled to visit the school for an assembly, where Mr Kemp was to present our gift to the school. Prior to this we were able to have a tour of the school, after a brief discussion with the school's principal and deputy about how we can best continue to support the school.

The assembly was very memorable for us all, not only because of the privilege of presenting our gifts, but due to the intense, oppressive heat and humidity that we experienced. I can remember the looks of despair on the 'Boss's' faces as we sat at the front of the large hall, seeing everyone become increasingly drenched as time wore on. This, however, did not detract from the assembly and the sense of privilege we felt at being there. It was humbling when the head boy gave us some gifts to take back to Adelaide for our school. We laughed with the 1100 or so students, as we enjoyed a very energetic pan flute and dance performance from some extremely agile young people.

From a personal perspective, I found the trip stirring. The people of the Solomons are warm and friendly, and even though they have very little, they seem content.

We were able to leave well over a hundred letters from some of our students at the school in the hope of establishing some pen pal relationships between both schools, and I understand that Mike has lots of responses that he will be delivering when he returns. It will be great for our students to get a glimpse of the different type of life that adolescents in a third world country experience. Differences that we enjoy, such as fresh clean water, sanitation, medical supplies, surfaced roads, a reliable power supply - there was a power cut while we visited the school - secure shelter from the elements, air conditioning in stifling humidity, technology – only five or six computers for 1100 students – as well as having a ball or two to kick around, or exercise books to write in.

We had to rush off after the assembly as the tour had a very tight schedule to adhere to, but I know from the many comments received, that the whole experience affected many of the other visitors. Some were moved to donate money to our cause themselves, and also to look at ways their own industries could become involved in supporting the people of the Solomon Islands.

Some of the soccer balls and pumps were left with the soldiers to take on patrol with them and to leave at the regional villages they visited. The soldiers like to play soccer with the local children, and possessing their own soccer ball is a wonderful thing for the village.

So... what now? We are planning to have an activity each term this year to continue to help support Bishop Epalle Catholic School, and we continue to be in contact with Principal Meke in this regard. The Reserve and Employer Support Division continues to help us co-ordinate transportation where possible.

We are running a competition at Golden Grove High School for our Middle School students giving them another opportunity to research what life is like in the Solomons.

From a personal perspective, I found the trip stirring. The people of the Solomons are warm and friendly, and even though they have very little, they seem content.

I felt very honoured to be able to visit the school and meet some of the teachers and students, and be a part of one of their assemblies. I was very impressed with the calibre of the Reservists and the involvement we had with them was excellent in giving an overview of their role whilst on deployment. It was evident that the people of the Solomons are very appreciative of the Australian Army Reserve soldiers who are helping to maintain peace in their country.

Care Packages for the Solomon Islands Company Group

Received this from Major Scott Davidson who was serving in the Solomons. The other connection is he works for Fosters.

Subject: FW: Thanks for RVR Packages

Date: Mon, 8 Jun 2009 13:00:05 +1000

The blokes and I would like thank you and the RVR Association very much for the care packages that arrived this week. They've been really well received, as have the magazines and books.

I don't know what you've been receiving in the way of info, but most of the blokes are really enjoying themselves, and learning a lot about operations. We're patrolling constantly in support of the police, and we've conducted several independent operations across Guadalcanal doing reconnaissance and "civil affairs" work. It's very different to being a "Tuesday night chokko", and a lot of blokes are putting their hands up to go full-time after this. I'm happy to come back to Fosters, though - that should be interesting itself!

The Islands are a mixed-up place: a strange blend of stone-age traditions and internet-level expectations. Villages might not have running water, but they know their human rights off pat, and demand "compensation" for everything. There is one place where the government wants to repair a bridge, and the village wants compensation before they will allow the repairs!

The weather has been everything we expected: hot and humid, with rain almost every day. Here, though, the rain is so warm, and you're sweating so much anyway, that it doesn't really make much difference.

We've had a bit of a chance to look around, and there is a lot more WWII history to catch up on yet. The locals dig up UXO every day - grenades, rockets, bombs, etc. They use the explosives to make fish bombs, which some times go off prematurely: the coppers reckon tampering with UXO kills ~5 people a month. The other big hazard here is the homebrew, known as kwaso. It's foul - you can strip paint with it - but they get on it big on Friday and Saturday nights. That when they start fighting with their rocks and bush knives, and we get called out to keep the peace.

Anyway, thanks again for thinking of us, and we're looking forward to catching up with everyone very soon.

Cheers, Scott.

ANZAC Day, 2009

Ballarat



From the Saint Arnaud paper: **ANZAC Day: Stuart Mill**

Stuart Mill remembered those who fought in the wars in their ANZAC Day Coemmmoration Service, which was led by Stuart Mill's CWA Vice President, Mrs Sharon Douglas.

We were fortunate to have as a guest, Major Neil Leckie, from the 8th/7th Battalion RVR in Ballarat. He kept everyone glued to their seats as he gave his talk. Not even the children stirred as they listened intently.

EX YPRES, 12 -18 SEP 2009 (Major Leckie)

The training objectives of the exercise were to complete a number of qualifications for soldiers and junior leaders set in a battalion controlled exercise scenario carrying out tasks which both the HRR and RRF members would undertake on deployment. These objectives were obtained with the added benefit of giving wide media coverage to the recruitment areas of the Swan Hill and Mildura barracks.

Advance Party: Under command of Captains Johnston and Spencer the Advance Party departed from Ballarat and moved to Swan Hill to establish the base for the 'Mission Rehearsal Exercise or MRE' at Swan Hill.

Early on Saturday 12 September, 32 staff and students headed to Puckapunyal to undertake their Navigation and First Aid Courses which would see them qualified to either join the company undertaking the activities at the Mildura Airport later in the week, or act as civilian protesters as a part of the activity.

The main body assembled at Swan Hill during the day and activities commenced Sunday morning with a MRE which included a Cordon and Search at 'Logan's Farm south of Swan Hill.

The scenario used in the exercise was one which included two Issue Motivated Groups or IMGs and the remnants of the Musorian Army Forces defeated in the battle at Puckapunyal in June. So, Sunday saw the enemy party from 5/6 RVR under command of OC B Coy Captain Daniel Strack, move on to Mildura to set up their 'base'. Some headquarters elements also moved to Mildura on Sunday.

Training in IMT and battle preparation continued at Swan Hill and at it was 'on the buses' and off to the Mildura Show Grounds for a couple of hours sleep before deploying to the Mildura Airport. Some slept well, however for a couple of others, including some Directing Staff or 'DS' an early wake-up occurred when the oval's sprinkler system activated dampening some members who were sleeping on the oval and also some who were in the grandstand. Undaunted, by 0230 hours on Tuesday morning the two platoons, along with OC Captain Doherty, CSM WO2 Peter Daniels and their Company Headquarters, Lt Col Laidlaw (the CO), WO1 Buskell (the RSM) and the Safety Vehicle, were ready to commence the 11 or 12 km insertion into the airport. The insertion started well, but was held up for a while when the lights on the Safety Vehicle failed. A replacement vehicle was brought forward and the insertion continued. All of South Mildura knew that something was happening, as every dog in the district ('the dogs of war') barked as the company walked down Walnut Avenue to the airport. By daylight, the company had 'secured' the airport and had begun the task of inserting the 'Vehicle Check Point' (VCP) and 'hardening' specific 'vital assets' at the airport.

It didn't take long before the 'protestors' heard that the government had deployed its Defence Force to 'secure' the airport and ensure that the civilian infrastructure was not affected by the 'protestors'. What was meant to be a 'peaceful' demonstration by the 'Save Our Wildlife' IMG against the Defence Force increasing the number of flights in and out of the Mildura Airport turned nasty when a few stirrers from the more vocal 'Australian Against War' IMG who want the Defence Force out of Mildura. Several scuffles broke out when the demonstrators crossed the underprepared VCP line and began pulling apart the sand bag walls and throwing items from the stores trailer. The Victoria Police were called and responded with a 'Brawler' van and six of the most physical 'protestors' were arrested and in the words of the football song 'went home in the back of a Divvie van!' with torn shirts and a few bruises.

Removal of the 'protestors' saw work progress quickly on the VCP and the barbed wire installed channelled all who wanted to enter the airport through the VCP. Meanwhile, work was progressing at the hanger on the edge of airport apron that was being used as a headquarters and at the 'Key Point' building (the airport control building, which was represented by the Museum building).

Patrols were undertaken in and around the airport, both by day and by night, and the most interesting incident for the exercise occurred late on Tuesday night. Airport management had advised the battalion that a number of 'incidents' had occurred in the past few months where

fuel and parts had been stolen from some of the Hire Cars stored at the airport. Late that evening a car was driven into the airport and while still moving its lights were turned off and the car stopped some distance later beside a Hire Car compound. Having driven past a sign that showed 'Military Exercise in Progress' and past a number of Army tents etc, four of the 'world's smartest criminals' left the vehicle, climbed under the fence and began to remove parts and fuel from the Hire Cars. The piquet observed this activity and quietly woke two Corporals from their platoon who, in civilian life, are Victoria Police members. Taking a patrol with them the Corporals, using Victoria Police procedures, challenged the four who fled the scene. Three were able to get away in their car, but the fourth could only get away on foot, crashing into a deep culvert and then running into some of the exercise barbed wire. The man was detained, the Mildura Police were called and the man was arrested and taken to the Mildura Watch House where he was charged. Apparently it didn't take long before the names of the other three 'who left me behind!' were obtained.

After that piece of 'real-life training', work at the airport returned to the normal routine of hardening facilities, patrols, piquets and protests.

Tuesday night had seen the arrival in Mildura of the Pre-Recruit Course First Aid and Navigation Course Staff and participants. Some of these became reinforcements at the airport, while the majority quickly took to the role of 'peaceful protestors'. The Intelligence Staff drew up 'Persons of Interest' dossiers on some of them and they were used to identify which of the 'protestors' should be detained, and which should be kept 'under surveillance'.

Early Thursday morning the remnants of the MAF banded together and attacked the 'key point' installation. They were repelled with significant losses and with minimal damage to the installation and no interruption to airport operations.

By mid-morning Thursday the exercise ceased and the pack up began. Naturally, the very pleasant weather changed and enough rain fell to dampen not only the enthusiasm of those operating at the airport, but also the tentage and stores. While the pack-up was under way at the airport, further training was being undertaken at the Mildura Barracks with the Pre-Recruit Course soldiers. On return from the field, the Intelligence Officer (and enemy expert) Staff Sergeant Solomano prepared and presented a series of RRF lectures for 23 of the battalion trained soldiers to complete part of the RRF Course.

After three days of CRP1Ms, dinner Thursday was a well prepared BBQ cooked up by the battalion's Catering Section under Corporal Bruce Wilson. A couple of drinks quickly sent all but the diehards to bed for a well-earned rest before all members headed home on Friday morning.

So were the objectives of the exercise achieved? Well and truly! The PR Plan prepared by Lt Perkins (the former Ballarat based 4 Bde PR Officer, now based at Shepparton) gave good advance notice and excellent coverage in both Swan Hill and Mildura during the exercise by the use of newspaper, television and on two radio stations. Hopefully, this coverage will turn into enquiries and finally recruits at each of the Swan Hill and Mildura barracks. Well done to all who planned and participated in this exercise!

Ballarat Ranger Military Museum

The museum had an interesting donation earlier this year. Medals awarded to two Ballarat district men have been returned to the district when a medal and memorabilia display was presented to the Ballarat Ranger Military Museum recently. Samuel Dennis senior was born in Fingal, Tasmania to convict parents Thomas Dennis (born Bristol, England) and Janet Cree

(born in Glasgow, Scotland). Samuel Dennis Junior was a 21 year old labourer from Smythesdale and undertook a medical examination at the 14th Depot Battalion Camp in Ballarat on 11th March 1916. He was enlisted into the 16th Reinforcements for Ballarat's 8th Battalion 2 days later. By 23rd March Samuel was in the Broadmeadows Camp and on the Troopship Suffolk on his way to Egypt on 1st April. After a time with Number 2 Training Battalion, Samuel joined the 8th Battalion in France on 15th November 1916. While in the trenches Samuel was gassed and along with contracting Trench Fever which led to Pleurisy he spent a lot of time in hospital. He returned to Melbourne on the Troop Ship Ulysses on 10th September 1917 and was discharged as Medically Unfit on 4th January 1918.

Following his War Service Samuel was awarded the 1914-18 Star, the British War Medal and the Victory Medal. After the war he married Mabel White from Smythesdale. Mabel's family lived on White's Road, Smythesdale, where the Yellow Glen mine was located. Yellow Glen wines at Smythesdale was named after that mine. Samuel Junior was the Apparatus Officer with the Smythesdale Fire Brigade. He died in 1924 and his funeral was attended by Fire Brigade members and Ex-Servicemen. He was survived by his pregnant wife Mabel and daughters Elizabeth (Betty) and Drucilla.

Samuel's son, known as Samuel the third, was born 3 months after his death. Samuel the third worked for Nicholas Pharmaceuticals, manufacturer of Aspro headache tablets, and qualified in the Industrial Management field. He worked with Nicholas for 40 years both before and after WW2. During WW2 Samuel Junior enlisted in the RAAF in December 1942 and was posted as an Aircraftsman at the 1st Flying Boat Repair Depot on discharge. He was awarded the War Medal 1939-45 and the Active Service Medal 1939-45. Samuel the third was active in Surf Life-saving, bowls and Probus. He married Nancy and had 3 sons. Nancy died in 1993 and Samuel married Dr Cheryl Kerr-Dennis in 2001. Samuel the third passed away in Brisbane in 2007. While Samuel loved Smythesdale, and regularly returned there, he also loved the sea and was buried in Coff's Harbour where he and Cheryl had lived for 7 years.



Dr Kerr-Dennis (Left) presented the medals of Samuel Dennis (Junior) and Samuel John Dennis (the third) and other memorabilia to the Museum Manager, Major Neil Leckie, in Cleveland, Queensland, where Cheryl now lives when Major Leckie was on holidays in Queensland. The Dennis presentation is on display in the Ranger Museum which is open 'By Appointment'. To arrange a visit to the museum, please call Major Leckie or WO2 Broemmer at the barracks on 5330 4500 during working hours.

Affiliated Units (Major Leckie)

Royal Regiment of Canada

Prince Charles, The Prince of Wales, presented new Colours to the Royal Regiment of Canada and the Toronto Scottish Regiment, on the 5th November during tour of Canada with his wife, Camilla the Duchess of Cornwall. Prince Charles is the Colonel-in-Chief of both regiments. The ceremony's location, the downtown Varsity Stadium, has historical significance since it was the site of the 1965 Presentation of Colours to the Toronto Scottish Regiment by Prince Charles's grandmother, the late Queen Mother. It was the Princes's 15th visit to Canada.

I cannot tell you how moved my wife and I are that so many of you have chose to come here on this autumnal evening, or are watching this parade on television at home, or who line what has so poignantly become known as 'The Highway of Heroes' to honour the fallen," Charles said during a formal military ceremony Thursday night, in front of more than 5,000 people

The Toronto Scottish Regiment wore its beige kilts, while the Royal Regiment of Canada wore traditional red coats.

The band played God Save the Queen as Prince Charles entered wearing the uniform of the Royal Regiment of Canada and a tall busby fur hat, with Camilla in a dark coat and beret.



Their old colours, or flags, were marched off the field, in anticipation of the presentation of the new Colours. Plans are being made to deposit the Old Colours in The Cathedral of St. James. The regiments may be the last Canadian Regiments to carry the Union Flag on Parade.

Left: Col Trollope, CO Royal Regiment of Canada

Staffords

In May I took the opportunity to head overseas for a quick refresher visit to the battlefields of France and Belgium. I decided to do this trip so that I could tie it in with the parade for the Laying Up of the Colours of the Staffordshire Regiment in Lichfield in the UK and catch up with Private Ben Collyer who is on attachment to the London regiment while he is working in London.

The Staffords were formed in Lichfield over 300 years ago, and were presented with new Colours after their Regular Army Battalion (the 1st Battalion, the Staffordshire Regiment) returned from Iraq in 2006. Shortly after receiving their new Colours the Staffordshire's Territorial (Army Reserve) Battalion was transferred to become two companies of the Territorial West Midlands Regiment. Then the 1st Staffords joined with the 22nd (Cheshire) Regiment and the Worcestershire and Sherwood Foresters Regiment (29th, 36th, 45th & 95th Battalions) to form the Mercian Regiment. The Staffordshire Regiment (The Prince of Wales's) (38th, 64th, 80th, 98th Battalions) is now the 3rd Battalion (Staffords) of the Mercian Regiment.

The 3rd Battalion marched through the City of Lichfield, with swords drawn, bayonets fixed, bands playing and flags flying. It was a spectacular sight, with 4 full strength company groups, the band and the Colours. They marched past the Guild Hall (Town Hall) and the flags of the many branches of the Staffordshire Association on their way to the Cathedral, where the Laying Up Service was held.

The following day saw a luncheon of past members of the Regiment at Keele Hall, Newcastle on Tyne, attended by past members from as far as Saudi Arabia, Ireland, etc.

The 3rd Battalion (Staffords) has now deployed to Germany for an indefinite period. Battalion members holidaying overseas should make enquiries through the XO about visiting the Staffords if visiting Germany, or the London Regiment if visiting London.

Greetings from an old friend

I am pleased to be asked to write an article for this year's Ranger Magazine and bring news from Afghanistan.

My family and I departed 8/7 RVR with sadness as we drove away from many great friends that we were able to make while living in country Victoria. Thankfully, we were going home to Townsville and for me to a Regular Army Battalion that was preparing for operations in the Middle East.

On arrival back in my original battalion, 1st Battalion, the Royal Australian Regiment, life went into over-drive as we frantically covered all training aspects that would contribute to our success in Afghanistan. We progressed through the suite of live firing activities, mission specific training and the mission rehearsal exercise, which allowed soldiers to focus on the threat that was about to face us. Resilience was a major concern for the Commanding Officer and me as we knew that the entire Battle Group was going to need to draw on strengths they didn't know they had. A 40 km route march was a tool we used to demonstrate that everyone could push through adversity. I am thankful of the many practice sessions that I had around Lake Wendouree and through the streets of Ballarat.

I deployed with my Advance Party at the end on May 2009 for the eight month deployment with a scheduled return date of Feb 2010. The trek to arrive in Afghanistan took us to Kuwait where we conducted a six day training package that orientated everyone on what was to confront them within theatre. Close quarter battle shooting, detailed first aid training and acclimatisation were key areas that we concentrated on. This was our first introduction of working with the US Forces and to operate on a base that accommodates 30 000 troops is an experience we will never get in Australia.

The forward deployment to Tarin Kowt, Afghanistan, was an exciting day. All the preparation was about to be realised and as we have discovered, we had all bases covered. I have had many memorable experiences during my tour of duty and recall a few for you now.

This is a war where everyone needs to do more than their primary employment. I have been with many soldiers who have deployed as cooks or vehicle mechanics and other trades who don't normally go into direct combat with the enemy. I have been impressed by the willingness and professionalism of all soldiers, in particular; these soldiers to go into harm's way. The courage that the wounded personnel display has been a strength for the entire Battle Group to draw upon.

I have been astounded by how quickly all ranks have been able to adapt to the human environment of Afghanistan and easily communicate with the soldiers of the Afghan National Army. Mentoring this army has been our core business and the achievements by the mentors have been exceptional. Direct contact with the enemy, improvised explosive devices and dealing with the local community that is used to the ravages of war has pushed the Australian soldier to his and her limits.

Our achievements during the election period, where the world was watching with great interest, was attributed to the forward planning and close relationships the Battle Group had with the coalition forces. No Australian was hurt and the elections were successful.

The geography of Afghanistan is spectacular ranging from low valleys to snow covered mountain peaks. The weather varied from -15 degrees in winter to 50 degrees in summer. Carrying body armour that weighted 25 kg made for extremely tough conditions. Our cameras had a work out and captured some memorable events.

My return to Australia was during February 2010, nearly nine months after I deployed. A great bond has been made between over 800 men and women who have fought an enemy that is determined and lived with a culture that is nothing like ours

Throughout the tour I rang a few old friends from 8/7 RVR and from Ballarat. I recall, fondly, the time my family and I had in country Victoria and look forward to catching up in the future.

Take care

Darren Murch, WO1, RSM 1 RAR, (RSM 8/7 RVR 2007/08)

History

We have a tendency in the battalion to think first and foremost of the 7th and 8th Battalions of Militia who fought in World War 2, and whose battalion numbers we use today, and not so much about the 2/7th and 2/8th Battalions, whose history is also a part of our history. Both AIF battalions have many stories and many characters within their ranks.

The 2/7th has one particular character who achieved what no one else before him had achieved. Reg Saunders was born at Purnum near the Framlingham Aboriginal Reserve in South Western Victoria, in 1920. Saunders father fought in World War 1. His uncle, William Reginald Rawlings, after whom he was named, received a Military Medal for his actions at Morlancourt in France. Following the death of his mother, Saunders was raised by his grandmother at Lake Condah. He rarely attended school and found work in a saw mill. He dreamt of travelling overseas to fight for the oppressed and impoverished people with whom he could identify. In 1940 he got his wish to travel overseas and fight, but for Australia, not the oppressed and impoverished.

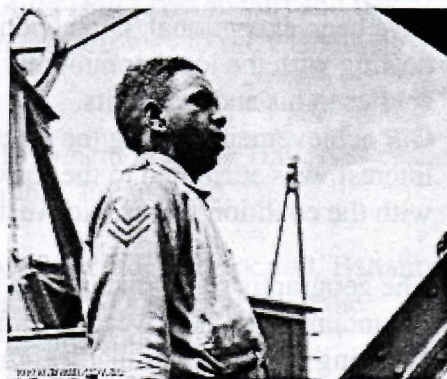
Reg Saunders joined the 2/7th Battalion in the 6th Division after his initial training, and went on to fight in North Africa and Greece. With his battalion, Saunders withdrew from Greece to Crete. The 2/7th was one of the units that were left behind on Crete. Some members were taken prisoner, but Saunders was among those who remained hidden for almost twelve months. It is said that his swarthy skin saved him on a number of occasions.

Saunders was promoted to Sergeant and when fighting in New Guinea in 1944, he was recommended for officer training. In November 1944, Reg Saunders became the first Aboriginal commissioned in the Australian Army.

He had shared a tent with Tom Derrick VC (below left), during his officer training. Saunders returned to the 2/7th Battalion in New Guinea, serving as a Platoon Commander for the rest of the war, discharging in late 1945.



Reg rejoined the Army and as Captain Saunders commanded a company of 3 RAR at the Battle for Kapyong in



Korea. He returned to Australia in November 1951 and oversaw training for National Servicemen. He finally discharged from the Army in 1954. Saunders became active in the Returned and Services League and in later years he worked as an Aboriginal Liaison Officer for the Office of Aboriginal Affairs.

Saunders became a Member of the Order of the British Empire (Civil Division) in 1971 for his community work. He died in 1990 leaving behind two ex-wives and eight of his ten children.

2/7th Battalion (AWM website)

Part of the 17th Brigade of the 6th Australian Division, the 2/7th Battalion opened its headquarters at the Royal Melbourne Showgrounds on 25 October 1939. It relocated to the newly-established camp at Puckapunyal on 3 November to carry out its basic training, and departed Melbourne for service overseas on 15 April 1940.

Arriving in the Middle East on 17 May 1940, the 2/7th conducted further training in Palestine and Egypt, before embarking on its first campaign – the advance against the Italians in eastern Libya – just before Christmas. It fought in the battles for Bardia (3–5 January 1941) and Tobruk (21–22 January 1941) and ended its activities in Libya manning defensive positions at Marsa Brega – the western extent of the advance.

In early April 1941, the 2/7th, with the rest of the 6th Division, deployed to Greece to resist the anticipated German invasion. For the 2/7th, the Greek campaign was essentially one long withdrawal through a series of rearguard positions, beginning on 16 April. The majority of the 2/6th was evacuated from Kalamata aboard the "Costa Rica" on the night of 26 April. On the afternoon of 27 April, however, the "Costa Rica" was crippled by German aircraft. The men of the 2/7th were rescued by a pair of British destroyers and landed on Crete.

On Crete, the 2/7th were initially deployed to defend the coastline around Georgioupolis but, after the German airborne landings on 20 May, were soon moved up to join the fighting around Canea. On 27 May the battalion took part in a wild bayonet charge at 42nd Street that temporarily rebuffed the German advance. The 2/7th subsequently played a critical rearguard role as the Allied forces retreated across the island to Sphakia. As a result, the battalion was left behind and taken prisoner after the withdrawal of the last evacuation vessels from Sphakia on 1 June.

Rebuilt in Palestine, the 2/7th formed part of the garrison in Syria between October 1940 and February 1941, before leaving the Middle East on 12 March 1942. Between mid-March and mid-July it formed part of a force defending Ceylon (present-day Sri Lanka) from possible Japanese attack, and did not disembark in Australia until 4 August 1942.

The 2/7th, as a whole, first met the Japanese in battle in the mid-January 1943 as part of the force defending Wau in New Guinea, although its carrier platoon had already been involved in fighting at Buna in Papua. Once Wau was made secure in early February, the 2/7th subsequently participated in the drive towards Salamaua. After arriving back in Australia on 6 October 1943, the battalion spent most of 1944 training in northern Queensland.

On 16 November 1944, the 2/7th disembarked at Aitape in New Guinea for its final campaign. Between January and June 1944, it was engaged mainly in arduous patrolling to clear the Torricelli Range, and in August it carried out a similar role in the Prince Alexander Range. The battalion returned to Australia on 18 December 1945 and disbanded at Puckapunyal in February 1946.

Casualties

226 killed, 473 wounded

Decorations

6 DSO 2 MBE 11 MC 5 DCM 26 MM 60 MID

Battle Honours

North Africa

Bardia 1941

Capture of Tobruk

Greece 1941

Middle East 1941-1944

Crete

Canea

42nd Street

Withdrawal to Sphakia

South-West Pacific 1942-1945

Wau

Mubo I

Bobdubi II

Komiatum

Liberation of Australian New Guinea

Maprik

Yamil-Ulupu

Kaboibus-Kiarivu

The Rarest Rising Sun Badge



In reply to a query on a Swiss

manufactured silver Rising Sun Badge there is no doubt it must be the rarest of the Rising Sun Badges. The badge was manufactured for members of the AIF who escaped or evaded capture after the collapse of Italy in 1943 and then found their way to Switzerland. The manufacture of the badges was arranged by Lieutenant D.A. MacDonald the Amenities Officer of the 2/13th Battalion. Badges were authorised by Major H.J. Kroger in his capacity as Senior AIF Officer in Switzerland. There is only one of these badges known to be in any collection in Australia. It is up to the reader to determine the rarity of these badges which as the photographs show is about the same size as the normal collar badge but are more rounded in design.



Another Old Friend:

Left: In the news. Front page of Army: Sergeant King (right) was Corporal Damien King, Tpt Pl, 8/7 RVR.

Laying Up Parade for
Staffords Colours,
Lichfield UK, May 2009

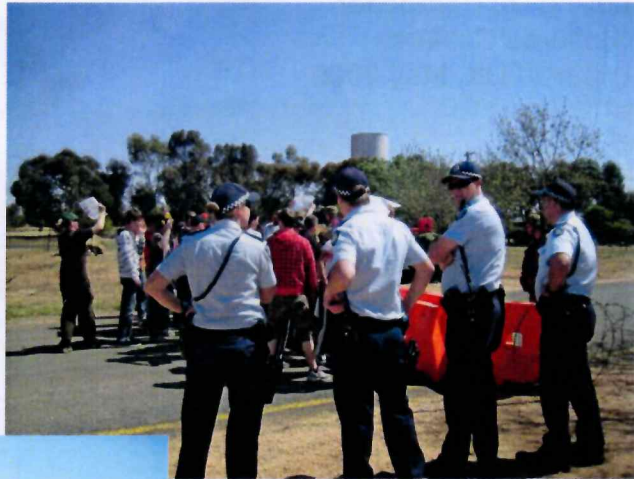


Protestors, Ex Ypres,
Mildura Airport,
September 2009



3 Platoon, Rotation 18, heading for the Solomons

Protestors and Police at VCP,
Ex Ypres, Mildura Airport



Vehicle Patrol,
Ex Ypres, Mildura Airport

Captain Strack with his Customs Manager
at Op Vic Fires Assist
Employers Thank You function,
24 Jun 2009



A few moments of rest and
recreation: football at
Kinglake



The cook's best friend at the
Mess Block, National
Service Lines, Puckapunyal,
May 2009

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