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The Purple Circle

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Winter Edition 2016



ANZAC DAY 2016

Next Meetings

Our next meeting will be the AGM on Sunday 22nd August. All members are requested to attend so they can have their say in the running of our Association for the next 12 months.

Following that our final two meetings for the year will be held on **18th September** and **20th November**.

Make a note of these dates in your diary.

Passing Parade

Ross George Thorburn passed away on 7 April 2016. Ross was aged 71 years and 4 months. He joined the Army in 1964 and served in Borneo with 1 Fd Sqn, 1965, Vietnam with 3 Fd Tp and 1 Fd Sqn, 1965-66 and in Malaya with 11 Indep Fd Sqn, 1967-69. Ross was a WA boy, born in Subiaco.

Allan Robert (Sticks) Hill passed away on 11 April 2016. Sticks was aged 78 years and 1 month. He joined the ARA Special Reserve in 1956 and joined the ARA in 1962, taking discharge in 1986. He served in Malaya with 7 Independent Fd Sqn, 1957-59 and in Vietnam with 17 Const Sqn, 1968-69. He also had two stints with 22 Const Sqn, 1969-76 and 1983-86. Sticks was a WA boy, born in Subiaco. He was a member of the Association.

Haldon Middleton (Hal) Cook passed away on 17 April 2016. Hal was aged 99 years and 8 months. See "IN MEMORY OF".

Patrick Joseph (Paddy) Cranswick passed away on 16 May 2016. Paddy was aged 90 years and 1 month. See "IN MEMORY OF".

Membership Subscriptions

Subs are now due and our trusty Treasurer (Neville) is busy printing and posting out notices. It would be appreciated if subs were paid promptly as it saves a lot of follow up work by Neville.

Change of Address

Just a reminder that if you change any of your contact details, could you please let Neville or myself know. It is nice to have the correct details when trying to contact someone.

IN MEMORY OF

HALTON MIDDLETON (HAL) COOK



Hal was born on 13 August 1916 in Perth WA, the oldest of three children. His brother and sister are deceased.

Hal's early life centred around his father's work as a lighthouse keeper, managing lighthouses at Rottnest Island, Breaksea Island, south of Albany, Point Charles, north west of Darwin and finally to Cape Don lighthouse, north east of Darwin.

The Cook's stayed at Cape Don for many years, the children being taught by their mother and Hal was taught many life skills by the local aboriginals. At nine years of age, Hal was sent to Fremantle where he stayed with an aunt and uncle and their two children so he could continue his studies at Girton College.

On leaving school, Hal worked at the Mt Lawley Post Office as a postman. Becoming bored, he moved to the country and tried his hand as a farm labourer, fence post cutter, wood cutter, mine worker and a delivery driver between Norseman and Kalgoorlie.

On 20 August 1940, Hal joined the Army at Karrakatta and was assigned to the 1st Railway Construction Company, RAE, a part of the 6th Division. The Unit was deployed to Jenin in Palestine, then relocated to El Amiriya in Egypt and then to Syria to building a railway line from Tyre to Tripoli. The unit was moved back to North Africa where they cleared German minefields.

Hal returned to Australia in 1943 and after a short leave, moved to New Guinea to build a road from Labu to Wau. Sickness took its toll and Hal returned to Australia to recuperate. Whilst on course in Melbourne, Hal met Noreen Flynn and they married in Sydney in May 1945.

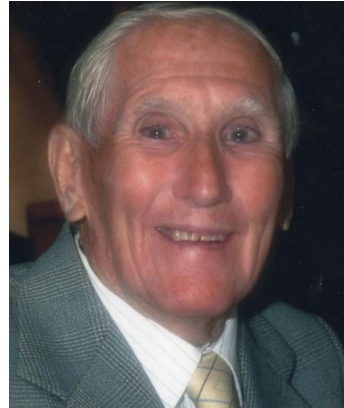
After the war, Hal worked for the Kalgoorlie Roads Board before moving to Perth and worked for Perth City Council. Hal was the site engineering supervisor on many Perth projects until he retired in 1979.

Hal and Noreen had four children, three daughters and a son, and lived in Scarborough before retiring to Hamersley in 1981.

Hal passed away on 17th April 2016

IN MEMORY OF

PATRICK JOSEPH (PADDY) CRANSWICK



Paddy was born on 7 April 1926 in Rose Park, Adelaide. He was the 13th of fourteen children, his eight brothers and five sisters pre-decease him.

Paddy grew up in Colonel Light Gardens in Adelaide and attended St Teresa's Catholic primary school in Glenelg. After failing Grade 6, Paddy left school and went to Victoria where he started work at the age of fourteen with Danks Engineering in South Melbourne.

He joined the Army on 19 October 1944 and after completing Infantry training was sent to the RAE Training Centre Kapooka for Field Engineer Training. On the morning of 21 May 1945, Paddy stayed in camp for administrative reasons. He was about to make his way out to the demolition range to join his Section when a loud explosion was heard. All twenty four trainee sappers and two instructors were killed. Paddy's Section was gone.

On the completion of his training, Paddy was to have been posted to 9 Workshop & Park Company, Brisbane Qld, but instead of joining a new Section to finish his training, he was posted to 20 Aust Base Sub-Stores Platoon and then B Detachment, 3 Engr Base Stores Depot at Wayville, SA. This was close to home and away from the site of the tragedy.

Paddy was discharged in December 1946 and found work with Kelvinator and Phillips Refrigeration. He was a keen soccer player, playing as a forward for his club. He played for South Australia in the 1948 Interstate Carnival and representing Australia against South Africa in Melbourne in a friendly invitational game.

Paddy met Doreen who was holidaying/working in Adelaide and when Doreen returned home to Perth at the end of 1950, Paddy decided that Perth would be a good place to live and followed Doreen. He found work with Arcus Refrigeration.

Paddy and Doreen married on 20 June 1951 and lived in Wembley where they raised two boys and a girl.

Paddy moved to Forrestfield with his family in 1957 when he started work with SW Hart as foreman in the white goods finishes section until he retired in 1978.

Paddy passed away on 16th May 2016.

MEMBER PROFILE

GORDON BRIGLIN



Gordon was born on 1 July 1919 in Barton on Humber in the UK. He is an only child.

His father, Frederick, who was working in Australia at the beginning of WW1, joined the Army and served with 3 Sec, 3 Fd Coy, AE and served in Egypt with Lt John Napier and at Gallipoli and the Western Front. After the war he returned home to England.

At the age of 6 weeks, Gordon and his parents immigrated to Australia. On arrival, the family lived in Bellevue where he grew up. He attended Midland Junction Primary School and Midland High School.

Gordon was 15 years of age when he left school and started work as an electrical assistant at the mechanical firm of AJ Bramley & Co in West Perth.

Gordon joined the Army in 1941 and because of his trade, was assigned to the RAE and posted to 5 Fortress Engineers, Searchlight Company, Rottneest Island. He then transferred to 5 Motor Ambulance Company, Fremantle and finally to 5 Amphibious Vehicle Increment sailing out of Morotai Island in support of Australian troops during the assault on Borneo and surrounding islands in 1945.

After the war, Gordon and his family lived in Midland where he bought his own electrical contracting business, G Briglin Electrician. In 1960, he sold the business and went to work for Elders where he remained until his retirement in 1979.

In 1941 Gordon married Edna and they had 2 daughters. His wife passed away in 1991 and he remarried only for his 2nd wife to pass away in 1997. He again remarried and when he could no longer care for Marie in his later years, she moved in a nursing home in Mundaring.

When he sold his business in 1960, he also sold his Midland house and with his family moved to Greenmount, where he still lives.

ANZAC Day



The day started with the 13 Brigade dawn service followed by the Association's service of the reading of the names and our wreath laying service. Our numbers were down this year, the 13 Fd Sqn personnel were not able to attend due to Brigade requirements and the march starting a half hour earlier in Perth.

As usual our in house Perth Transit driver, Jim Spink, was able to get a bus to transport everyone to and from the march. Well done Spinksy.

Once in Perth the weather decided it was time to start raining. This made for unpleasant conditions, some came prepared with umbrellas, plastic ponchos and hooded jackets, however there were many hearty souls who braved the wet conditions from the start like true Sappers.



Standing in the rain waiting for the order to move off.

Once we started the march the rain was soon forgotten. Half way along St Georges Terrace it stopped raining which improved conditions for the rest of the march. That was until we got to Langley Park where the ground was soggy and puddles of water everywhere.

While the number of spectators were down on past years, the Association got a good ovation as our banner approached. There was a good turnout of marchers in spite of the rain. It was estimated that about 80 of our members marched which was a good showing.

Reports from at home viewers was that when the RAE Banner appeared on the TV screen, the commentators made reference to the passing of Mick Ryan last October which was a nice thought.

13 Field Squadron



Postings & Promotions

WO2 Ken Hughes (Trg WO) left the Squadron in May on posting to Dubai. Sgt Brendon Dixon has agreed to a 12 month full time duty consignment and took up the position of Trg WO on 1st July.



Sappers making the most of the dry before the march

We have to feel sorry for the servicemen who marched in uniform. The Sappers were able to shelter from the light rain before the march but were called onto the road to form up just as the heavy rain started.

A good crowd gathered back at the Ryan Club after the march to catch up with old mates for a few drinks and to spin a couple of yarns.

Waterloo Dinner

A special thanks to the Ryan Club committee and the organisers of the Waterloo Dinner. Over 60 Sappers of all age and rank attended and by the chatter before, during and after the dinner, it sounded like everyone had a good time.



Veterans' Luncheon

The next luncheon for our WW2 Honorary Members is planned for Monday 13th September 2016. The usual letter of invitation and pro-forma will arrive in the post prior to the event. For those who qualify to attend - **Put this date in your diaries.**

Our New SME Museum



AUSTRALIAN ARMY MUSEUM *of* MILITARY ENGINEERING

Our Role

To collect, preserve and exhibit the history of the Corps of Royal Australia Engineers and the Royal Australian Survey Corps



Public Access

The museum is open to the general public. Visitors without a Defence Pass are to meet at the Holsworthy Barracks Pass Office.

Current, government issued photo identification will be required for all visitors over 16 years of age.

Group bookings are essential, other visitors are advised to call to confirm timings.

Location:

Macarthur Precinct, Soldiers Way, Holsworthy Barracks, Holsworthy (Enter via Heathcote Road)

Contact:

Tel: 02 8782 8822 Fax: 02 8782 8842
Email: AAMME.mailbox@defence.gov.au

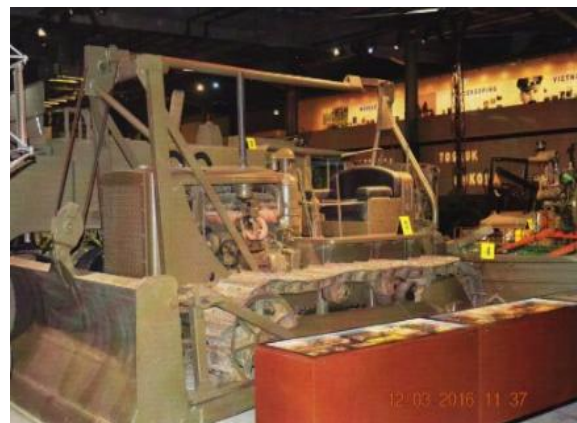
Hours:

ADF Members and Defence Civilians:
Monday to Friday,
9am to 3pm

General Public:

Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday
Visits commence at 9:45am and 12:45pm

Other times can be arranged by appointment



6 ESR assistance in the Philippines

Sappers put a lid on it

Engineers help rebuild school roof in the Philippines

Capt Dean Muller

THE smell of new paint and sounds of hurried shouts filled the air as sappers from 21 Const Sqn, 6ESR, rushed to assist their American and Filipino counterparts to finish the fit-out on a brand new school roof on the Philippine island of Panay.

Exercise Balikatan 2016 involved a contingent of 86 personnel from a range of specialisations across the ADF deploying to the Philippines to take part in the annual US and Philippine bilateral exercise, now in its 32nd iteration.

Spr Chad Horne, a carpenter from 21 Const Regt, said the engineers deployed in a support role to the US military and Armed Forces of the Philippines in helping reconstruct the San Nicolas elementary school.

"Since we've been here we've had to replace the roof," Spr Horne said.

"It's an all-steel structure roof and tied in so nothing can get blown away again. We've painted new doors and windows and provided new chalk boards along with lights and fans in the classrooms."

The school is located in a district that was ravaged by Tropical Cyclone Yolanda in November 2013, but that hasn't diminished their generosity and appreciation, according to Spr Scott Nolan.

"The locals have treated us very well," Spr Nolan said.

"They've come into our job site and greeted us with welcome arms. They provided us with food and water and they constantly come past with smiles on their faces."

Merlinda Navarra, a grade three teacher at the San Nicholas elementary school, said for the past three years they had been using the school without a roof.



Spr Chad Horne, of 21 Const Sqn, 6ESR, works with a member of the Armed Forces of the Philippines to repair a damaged school building. Inset: International carpenters at work. Photo by Cpl David Sisk

"When it rains we just move to the other side of the room the right side or the left side," Ms Navarra said.

"Thank you for repairing this building - the pupils will really benefit from the project."

Spr Nolan said working on the construction job had given the Australian engineers and other nations involved

with the project a lot of satisfaction.

"Seeing the locals, the smiles on their faces and the fact that we're giving back to a community that doesn't have a lot, gives you a sense of pride," he said.

"The fact that you're putting on this uniform and representing your country is very fulfilling."



Sausage Sizzle

A sausage sizzle was held at the Bunnings Balcatta store on 29 April 2016 and \$612 was raised. Thanks to all the volunteers who gave their time to help cook and serve the sausage rolls.

Photos Wanted

With the update to our website nearing completion, I am on the lookout for any photos of Sappers from 22 Construction Squadron and 13 Field Squadron to include in the Photo Gallery section of the website.

Once the typing part of the update is finished, it will be sent to our Web Master for him to make the necessary changes to the Web Site and then put it on-line.

The Photo Gallery will be on-going as new photos are received. If anyone would like something included on our website, let me know as it is intended that new photos and updates will be posted every 3 months.

Watchdog Celebrates 100 Years



The Royal Australian Corps of Military Police (RACMP) celebrated their 100th birthday in April.

The AIF Police Corps was formed in the Middle East in 1916 and was disbanded in 1920 along with other AIF units. The Corps was reformed in 1938 as the Australian Army Provost Corps and in 1948 was given the title "Royal".

In 1974 the Corps was given its current title of "Royal Australian Corps of Military Police (RACMP)".

A parade held earlier this year was inspected by The Governor General, Sir Peter Cosgrove, AK MC (Retd).

Visa Entry into Australia

A Pommy bloke fronted up to Australia House in London to get a visa so he could visit his family over here in Australia.

The gentleman behind the counter asks "Do you have a criminal record?"

The Pommy bloke sighs and replies "*Is that STILL a requirement*".

Cool Message by a Wife

Dear Mother-in-Law

"Don't lecture me on how to raise my children, I'm living with one of yours and he needs a lot of improvement".

Bumpy Landing

Flight attendant's message to passengers after a very bumpy landing

"Please remain seated with your seat belts buckled up while Captain Kangaroo bounces us to the terminal".

The Kapooka Tragedy

Lest not Forget

By Major Kieran Jackel



'On the 21st of May 1945, in a single blinding flash of gelignite 26 young lives were snuffed out in an underground bunker. When they buried the victims three days later, half of the population of Wagga Wagga – 7000 men women and children – lined the streets to bow their heads at the passing of the coffins. It remains to this day the Nations largest military funeral. But then something strange happened. Australia forgot.'

In an un-assuming paddock on the outskirts of Wagga Wagga five Bailey panels rest in place, encircled by 26 saplings for company. Unless you had taken a wrong turn on route to Kapooka, The Home of the Soldier, you would most likely be unaware of this site. Yet the fact remains that on this site a humble memorial exists in memoriam of the Australian Army's worst accident that claimed the lives of 26 soldiers, including two who died of wounds in hospital. All of those lost had a common hat badge and at some stage would have responded to 'Sapper'. Like many of the Sappers currently serving at the 1st Recruit Training Battalion I felt a wave of guilt to my ignorance of this event as the memorial service came and went this year.

The incident, or the 'Kapooka Tragedy' as it is referred, was in essence a training incident occurring during a demolitions practice. However it occurred during a time when the country was at war on the 21st of May 1945. The gravity of the loss likely compounded by the fact that World War II was drawing to a close, the Germans had surrendered and momentum was with the Allies in the Pacific.

It was the Australian Army's worst accident a tragedy so grim and gruesome it tore the heart out of a country town'

The Wagga Wagga Township has for over 70 years had a close relationship with the Australian Army, with the majority of soldier ab initio training being conducted at Kapooka, the Home of the Soldier since 1951. What is not widely known is the Corps association with the region, perhaps fitting in 2014-15 as the School of Military Engineering once again looks towards a new home.

In 1942 Sappers conducted their Field engineer training at what was then termed the Royal Australian Engineer Training Centre (RAETC). Wagga was chosen as the site to centralise six of the seven engineer training depots due to its proximity to

both Sydney and Melbourne. By July 1942 headquarters and accommodation had been established to provide for four engineer training battalions and also to accommodate for reinforcement training to Australian and United States Engineer units.

The method of training conducted at the RAETC at the time was viewed as radical, today it is the norm. The training continuum had evolved to a stage where it was believed trainees would retain more knowledge if training on a given subject area was concentrated over a number of weeks. As such, training focused on demolitions, minefields, field defences and machines, camouflage, roads, airfields, Sawmilling, cement construction and bridging. In order to progress in training each Sapper had to be deemed satisfactory in each area.

The parallels for the IET of today are obvious. This concentration of training concept also extended to instructors with subject matter experts being utilised based on module. A number of these instructors now have a plaque beneath one of the 26 trees on site.

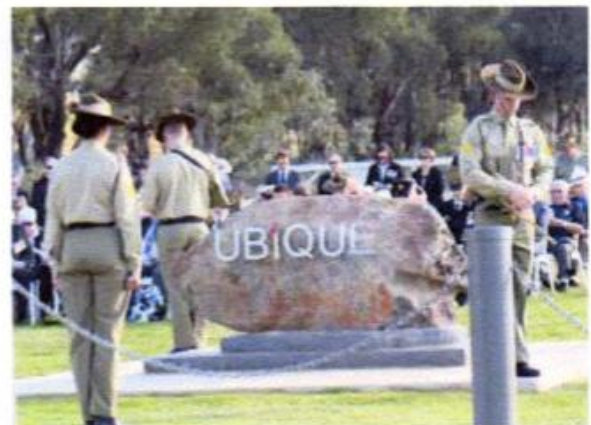
The day of the tragedy was like any other, week 4 of training, 0630 reveille, 0730 Breakfast in the mess, 0825 Morning Parade, 0840 Training begins.

At 1415 Lance Sergeant Kendal and three trainees entered the dugout (Bunker as known today) to prepare fuses for the night practices. This included affixing matches to lengths of fuse cord, attaching electric leads and binding with detonator cord.

At 1430 Sergeant Pomeroy, Corporal Cousins and twenty-two trainees entered the dugout for an explanation on the night practice and how to develop hand charges. In addition to the complement of trainees and staff, detonator cord, fuse wire and ignition sources; the dugout also contained over 50 Kilograms of High Explosive including Gelignite and monobel.

At approximately 1445 as members were counting detonators with safety fuses it is believed the explosion occurred. The dugout collapsed and smoke and debris filled the air. As Sappers, it is clear that this description is benign, and the scene confronting first responders would have been horrific.

In the chaos that followed both the military and community responded as best they could to the incident site, triaging survi-





Opposite page:

top left - The four flat bed trucks carry the 26 coffins to the Wagga Wagga war cemetery during the funeral service;

bottom right - ARTC staff, as well as veterans and their families, attended the memorial service near Kapooka on May 21, 2014.

Above: Former Sapper Paddy Cranswick, 88, of Perth, at the Kapooka Tragedy Memorial, 69 years after an explosion killed 26 of his mates. The cement wall at the end of the farm shed in the background is all that remains of the bunker where the explosion happened. (Source: Department of Defence)

vors and identifying the deceased. By 2000hrs all bodies had been identified and a nominal roll of the deceased produced. Telegrams were then dispatched to the members Next of Kin.

The funeral service conducted on the 24th of May saw four flat bed trucks carry the 26 flagged draped coffins to the Wagga Wagga war cemetery. As much as half the town turned out and lined the main streets in respect, with 200 returned servicemen forming a guard of honour.

The service had a profound and lasting impact on the region and emotion overcame a number of people during the service as the coffins were simultaneously lowered to the sound of a squad of buglers playing the last post.

As the Second World War ended, the Royal Australian Engineer Training Centre closed and all functions were absorbed into the School of Military Engineering that had been established at Masala in Sydney since 1939.

Annually, and only since 1995, the Army Recruit Training Centre conducts the Kapooka Tragedy Memorial on the 21st of May. Although a small and intimate service it provides a forum for those that still reside within the local community an opportunity to silently reflect on the tragedy and costs of service. At the time of the incident a prevailing social strategy existed of not talking about the difficult issues, rather focusing on moving on after the war. Consequently the memories of these fallen had

long only been held by families and friends, many who are clearly carrying the burden of age.

As I reflected on a simple handshake with a member who was, as fate would have it, attending an appointment at the time of the blast, I found myself compelled to strike this article driven by the sense that it needed increased awareness as an integral aspect of Corp history. I was shocked that as a member of the Corp for a decade and as a past Adjutant of the School of Military Engineering I was unaware of the magnitude of such an event.

As age will continue to claim those that remember that day I believe it is fitting the Sappers that continue to serve make effort to remember those that have given their lives, not simply in conflict, but also through training for it.

As an Army we continue to learn how to manage those that suffer following a traumatic event and perhaps the lessons associated with the past at times have not been fully learnt, as I am sure mates and commanders of those Sappers lost in recent operations can relate to the comments below:

Fellow instructors and sappers were devastated by the explosion particularly those who had to pack up the belongings of their mates. Paddy Cranswick was particularly distressed he was left alone in the six-man tent he had shared with sappers killed in the explosion for several days. Paddy still has nightmares which, he says, are like repeatedly watching the accident unfold 'as if watching it on TV'.

Perhaps we as a Corp owe elements of our Demolition Range Safety practices to these members and that the tragic loss has in some way contributed to the safety of all Sappers hence forth, and for that, lest we forget.

The Kapooka Tragedy Memorial and the Wagga Wagga War Cemetery are open to the public and recommended as a worthy Visit. The Author would like to thank and acknowledge the efforts of local historian Sherry Morris in researching and helping to revive this part of Corp History.