



Issue
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THE "MICE OF MORESBY" MEMBERS BULLETIN PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Last year your committee decided to try a change with the AGM. Instead of having it at our December re-union this was well documented in our "Orderly Room Gossip" which was mailed to all association members. Unfortunately, we failed to attract fourteen members, the number required for a forum. The normal business was conducted and all officers were re-instated, till the ANZAC Day meeting when they will need to be confirmed. I am sure that those present at our re-union on December 6 would agree that it was much better not discussing association business, election of officers etc in front of our families and distinguished guest, Minister of Veteran Affairs and Assistant Minister for Defence, Dana Vale.

It was a great disappointment for me to miss the occasion, as I had spent eight hours on the road with the bushfires just ahead of our coach and the helicopters overhead dropping water over everything. As far as I know I have "Congratulated" all members who rallied around and made the day a wonderful success.

From reports I received by mail, by phone and from personal contact. I do believe the minister would like to change our title to the "MIGHTY MICE OF MORESBY."

To change the subject, I was fortunate enough to be chosen to join seventeen ex-servicemen and two war widows to return to Papua New Guinea for the dedication of memorials at Milne Bay and Popengetta (Popondetta). The representatives came from all over Australia, seven from NSW six ALD, 4 Vic, 2 SA and 1 from WA. Because we all had so much in common, we bonded together into one large happy group. I think another contributing factor was that there were no high rankers, one lieutenant, the remainder all OR's. The young DVA crew that went along to help we old guys were absolutely fantastic, they catered to our every whim. Even applying sunscreen to our arms and faces. We had a brand new Hercules to take us to the memorial sites. Very noisy, and very small windows, fortunately only one hour flight to Milne Bay. To reach Popengetta one hour to Nadzab, then change to twin Otters to Popondetta.

Port Moresby is now a dirty run down area, the main shopping centre is modern, but we were warned not to go outside of the hotel as the "Rascals" are very dangerous. The houses all have electric fences, razor wire topped and all windows fitted with bars. Even the police station was burn down just before we arrived.

What we knew as "Ack Ack" Hill, Mt Touabouga, on the city side, because of the view, is the yuppie area, the prime minister's residence on top, then the high Commissioners place, just below that and other high rollers all the way down, on the other side are native huts along the shoreline and a few higher up, the old shore battery buildings are now toilets.

Looking from the harbour back towards the shore the small village we knew as Hanuabada along the waterfront has almost trebled and now stretched along the foreshore.

The main airport is the old Seven Mile Drome, now Jackson's, and to make access easier the controlling body have cut a road through the mountains, leaving a great big open scar, which will no doubt cover over in years to come. The "Macduhi" is still visible.

Milne Bay as we knew it, one giant coconut plantation grown for the copra, is now all overgrown. The locals have found a new source of income, a smaller palm from which they obtain Palm Oil and everywhere you look from the air, these crops looking like apple orchard.

The jungle has grown over everything and the beachhead of Buna, Gona and Sanananda are unrecognisable though we all crammed around the windows trying to recognise landmarks.

The monuments at Milne Bay and Popendetta have all been restored and maintained, a pleasure to behold the natives are very proud of their work, and the amount of wreaths and leis that were made and handed out to the party was very touching as of course were all the dedication ceremonies of which we were all nominated to take participate.

GUESS WHAT?

Right in the middle of one of the hymns at Milne Bay, the skies opened up and we were all drenched. TYPICAL!

My bowling club, Halekulani, gave me a plaque to honour the Fallen Comrades" of the 55/53rd Australian Infantry Battalion. I presented it to the president of the Port Moresby RSL Club and he assured me that it would be given a prominent position.

Knowing that our party would be visiting a local school I approached my St George Bank to see if I could get some pens. 100 pens and balloons were gratefully handed over. Imagine my surprise when we arrived at the Ted Diro Community School to see about 600 kids around the parade ground.

The last day of our trip was to the Bomana War Cemetery a day of mixed emotions. I was pleased to see that the cemetery was so well attended, looking splendid in the bright sunshine.

It was also pleasing to see that our members who were killed in Bougainville had been brought here and buried alongside their mates. Unfortunately, there are a number of headstones that indicate an "*Unknown Soldier is buried here*". On the hill overlooking the 3,774 graves is a tower whose walls have lists of the names of those whose bodies were never found.

I have taken photos of these and several "C" Company mates: but the memory of this day will live in my heart and mind forever.

Information regarding our ANZAC Day re-union at the Wynyard Hotel will be fully covered in the Secretary's report to all members.

My sincere thanks to the committee and member for their support during this last year.

SECRETARY'S REPORT

GARRISON CHURCH THE ROCKS. Members will recall that very wet day when a dedication ceremony was held at the church on the occasion of the presentation to the church of an association plaque. Unfortunately, the plaque did not measure up to the requirements of the church for the installation of the faculty in the church proper and is now on display in the museum attached to the church. This is a most interesting museum and is recommended to members as an ideal place to spend an hour or two while in Sydney.

RESERVE FORCES DAY COUNCIL has again invited us to take part in the Sydney parade on Sunday 6th July, together with invitations to personnel from United Kingdom, USA, Canada and

New Zealand. The Re-enactment group who have been so supportive of us in past years has offered to be our banner bearers the day and their offer is gratefully accepted, and you are all invited to join your mates on this occasion and support the effort of this association which has among its aim the recognition of the militia forces who have been the backbone of Australian defence forces. Unfortunately, the invitation to be present at the official launch extended to Peter and myself. if accepted would see us getting home about 2 am and an inability to attend has been delivered by phone to the convener. Further details of time and place for assembly will be available by ANCAC Day.

FINANCIAL REPORT was presented to those present at the annual general Meeting and accepted as a true record of the associations financial affairs. Members who wish to receive a copy of this report are welcome to make application to the secretary/treasurer and will be supplied for a fee of \$2.00 to cover production and postage.

OUR OVERSEAS FORCES, serving on IRAQ in particular, and many other areas are sure to be in our thoughts should the apparently inevitable conflict became a reality. We, who have first hand knowledge of what war means, would not wish it to occur, however the freedom of the worlds people to live decent lives is at stake. It is hoped that the action of the Security Council can resolve this problem without a worldwide violent reaction from militant fanatics.

YOUR COMMITTEE to refresh your memory your committee is

President	Peter Wright
Deputy President	Clyde Parsons
Secretary/Treasurer	Trevor Harper
Committee	Charles Jennings, Warwick Davis, Bruce Hilton, Jack Symonds, Harry Mathew.

THE MARCH OF TIME

The inevitable passing of time sees many of you members becoming more frail and suffering the vicissitudes of ill health. Members will be sorry to hear that our president for many years, Alex Bell, a tireless and dedicated worker for the good of the association and members, and other activities, fiercely proud of the unit and its men, is among that number. We extend to all our good wishes and concern.

**EULOGY FOR PRIVATE WILLIAM HENRY PEARCE
55 AUSTRALIAN INFANTRY BATTALION AND LATER
55/53 AUSTRALIAN INFANTRY BATTALION
AT THE PINEGROVE CREMATORIUM
FRIDAY 3 JANUARY 2003 AT 11.00 AM**

We gather in this chapel today, let us heed the last few words of a young Australian soldier, who lay dying in a ditch beside a road to Passchendaele during WWI.

“At least in Australia they will remember”

During my 9 years as RSL State President (NSW). I stressed the need for the Australian nation to be continually reminded of the outstanding and courageous service given by our servicemen and women in all wars and conflicts.

I chose to follow this course of action because I was mindful of the increasing length of time between the cessation of hostilities in WWI and WWII and the present generation I was concerned that as the years passed and memories waned, so the recognition and remembrance of their service and sacrifices in defence of their country would be in grave danger of being forgotten or even ignored.

Today provided a perfect example, as we gather to farewell, the late Henry Pearce, a fine soldier, a wonderful family man and an outstanding member of the community.

A man who served with courage and honour, in the 53rd Australian Infantry Battalion during its short existence from November 1941 to November 1942, when its amalgamation with the 55th battalion took place.

How many people would have heard of the 53rd battalion and its service on the “Kokoda Track” at places such as Uberi, Koitaki, Naro Deniki, during the Owen Stanley campaign?

Unfortunately, the answer is not very many, other than those here today or fellow veterans who thought illness or otherwise are unable to be present today.

Who do we blame?

A society, in which our values, customs and traditions have changed so much, since the end of WWII on 15 August 1945 or was it to some extent the veterans themselves for not talking more about their experiences other than on ANZAC day.

The shame and sorrow of it all, is that the true and often poignant story of their courage, compassion, and their wonderful commitment to mateship during those dreadful days of the jungle war, was never shared with members, many of whom, for years, would just as important, many in the community and the education department were told thus, our history books were to remain devoid of a most vital and significant part of our history. This was the time, when Australia faced its most dangerous period during 1942-1945.

Henry William Pearce was born on 28th June 1922 to Norm and Dorothy Pearce. Somewhere in the ensuing years, he acquired the nickname “CHOOK”. One can only ponder on the reasoning behind that choice. Henry grew up in the Waterloo area, and I suppose like many young people during those depression years, stayed at school only as long as necessary, before leaving to get a job to help the family.

On 28th October 1941 – aged 19 years Henry Pearce became a member of the Citizen Military (Militia) Forces where he was to serve until discharged on 25th October 1945, N35956, Pte “Chook” Pearce served – 495 days on Active Service in New Guinea, at Port Moresby and along that “Bloody Track” as it was often referred to by the diggers.

To tell us that “his height was 5 ft 5 ins. His eyes were hazel, his complexion was medium, his hair brown and he carried no scars.”

But not a do we read about the dangers he faced and the total lack of support given by the military high command to the 53rd battalion during the early days of their New Guinea service.

It is most important that one becomes aware of the circumstances, which Private “Chook” Pearce was to experience when he became a member of the CMF on the 28th October 1941.

1942 has often been referred to as “Australia’s Darkest Days.” The huge and seemingly invincible Japanese army had carried all before it in its advance throughout Malaya and Asia. They had landed on the North Coast of New Guinea and were advancing across the Owen Stanley Ranges. Towards Port Moresby where they would virtually be on Australia’s doorstep.

Now, the only troops who stood between the Japanese Army and Australia were a couple of battalions of poorly trained, ill-equipped young men. Some were members of the 2nd AIF whilst the majority were members of the CMF or “Chocos” or “Koalas” as they were often disparagingly referred to by many senior officers and politicians. But these were the young men who, together

with later re-enforcements would inflict the first ever defeat of WW2 on the Japanese Army. The story of how it was accomplished, reveals amazing example of courage, sacrifice, enduring mateship and compassion. A story, which becomes even more amazing as you read of their lack of preparation, training and equipment.

The 53rd embarked on the “Aquitania” on 21st December 1941 with many not having the opportunity to say goodbye to their families. The battalion landed at Port Moresby on 3rd January and spent its first night in the open.

Because of a lack of staff planning, all their cooking utensils and accommodation gear were stowed down in the holds of the ship, unable to be accessed when they were needed then, incredibly, for the next four months the battalion was to be used to provide working parties in and around Port Moresby, with no malarial protection, living under primitive conditions.

But more importantly, the battalion was to be denied the opportunity to undertake any jungle training, before going up against an army, who were masters in the art of jungle warfare. And, if that was not enough from February onwards they were to be subjected to continuing air raids by Japanese bombers around the clock.

I have emphasised these events, because it amazes me how these young men maintained their moral and sanity, it says much for their character and calibre of their officers and NCO's that they were able to cope with these conditions meanwhile, malaria and dengue fever had started to take their toll.

The planning staff of both Australian and American Headquarters still remained ignorant of the tremendous difficulties faced by troops who were not equipped to tackle a terrain as harsh as the Kokoda Track with virtually no medical equipment and dangerously low levels of supplies.

It has been said that there were those in General McArthur's staff who were of the opinion “That you could drive a truck along the track” or “you could blow up the ‘gap’ to halt any advance”. The type of thinking which demonstrated a total ignorance of the type of country in which they were sending young men to fight and die.

At the end of July, “B” and “C” companies were ordered forward to Kokoda to support the 39th battalion, moving through Koitaki and Itiki to Uberi. On 20th August “B” company moved forward to assist the 39th battalion. The 53rd began patrolling forward to Deniki.

Thus, began the Owen Stanley campaign which was to develop into the hardest yet fought by Australian Troops in WW2, and was fought in the world's worst terrain, with its mud, arduous climbs, perpetual rains, and mist and cold at night. The dense jungle could be so thick, it was impossible for the sunlight to filter through.

Disease was to slowly eat away at the fighting force and to cause more casualties than enemy action.

Later the 53rd battalion took up defensive positions astride the Kagi-Efogi track and all that day, the 39th battalion and troops of the 21st brigade moved through them to take up new positions south of Efogi.

Finally, on 21 September, the 53rd battalion was ordered back to Port Moresby, where without warning, they were amalgamated with the 55th battalion, to form the new 55/53 Battalion. The reasons for this amalgamation were never made known to these men, who deserved a better deal.

The new 55/53rd Battalion went on to fight gallantly at Sanananda, Gona and Bougainville, during which campaigns they received very heavy casualties.

Why even Tokyo Rose was to compare them with the ‘Rats of Tobruk’ living caves in the desert, by referring them as the ‘Mice of Moresby’ who would soon be driven from their holes. The 55/53rd Battalion was to adopt this name quite proudly and emblazoned it on their unit banner.

Following details of Henry's life, after his after discharge on 25th October 1945, his post war employment and eventually his admittance to Concord Repatriation Hospital where Rusty and Alice Kang were able to visit Henry on Christmas Eve a few hours before he passed away at 11.00 pm on 24 December 2002. Rusty concluded his eulogy as follows:

I count myself as a very fortunate man to have known Henry Pearce and to have enjoyed his friendship and humour.

At a time when our long held customs and traditions are under threat, we can ill afford to lose a man like Henry Pearce.

He was a gentle man who set very high standards of dignity, loyalty and mateship in his own life.

We are richer for having known Henry Pearce and to have enjoyed his company, but the world became a sadder place with his passing on 24th December 2002.

On behalf of the directors of the Kokoda Track Memorial Walkway, I wish to extend our sincerest condolences to the family over their loss. You have lost a loving father, grandfather and great Grandfather, we have lost a "Mate".

But I haven't relay lost Henry Pearce because each time I pass by the Uberi Station, I can remember him, particularly if I am with kids. Or I can also listen to Henry's voice on the Kokoda Track Memorial Walkway Web site, in the veteran's recollections section.

Vale Private Henry William Pearce
Rusty Priest A.M.