

55/53 Australian Infantry Battalion Association—  
Support Group  
ORDERLY ROOM REPORT  
October 2019 (2-2019)  
Website: 5553battalion.com



*55/53 Aust. Inf. Bn. Association  
("The Mice of Moresby")*

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**Fred Denny Sanananda Day Parade 2017**

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## Presidents Report



As we build up to our reunion on December 7 I would like the focus of this day to move towards our mice Children and Grandchildren.

We adjusted the falling of this day from the first Friday in December to the first Saturday so families could all be in attendance.

Please if you are attending this years Sanananda Day Memorial invite along as many of your family members and descendants as you can to join you

Kids meals will be from as low as \$7 with ice cream ..The Great Southern Hotel show us some great hospitality and really do look after us well

Please come along and support us ..The Picton Army Cadet unit will again be in attendance ..Thank you to Corporal Andrew Campbell and his cadets for once again providing the Catafalque party for our special day.

As some of you would have seen our Trip to PNG under the Guidance of Dave Howell and kokoda historical was an outstanding success.

The Village people of Sanananda and their hospitality was second to none and the 24 of us who travelled would revisit again without hesitation. We have been asked by the village elders of Sanananda to assist where we can with education of children and support at the Mater School in Popondetta. I am happy to give updates on this if anyone has.

Our next meeting will be held on Sat Nov 16 at Granville Diggers..All members and descendants welcome..Main topic of discussion will be the incorporation of the Battalion to assist us with future fundraising purposes..this is essential for the 55/53 to survive into the future.

Rob Denny  
National President  
Mice of Moresby  
55/53 Battalion Association & National Support Group  
**0437 818 834**

## SECRETARIES REPORT

### ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING & GENERAL MEETING:

A successful General & Annual General Meeting was held at Granville Diggers on 23 February 2019. The meeting was attended by 10 members including 3 veterans Ray Gentles, Reg Chard and Fred Denny. The Treasurer Arthur Perry tabled the finance report the association. The position is good after payments to establish the website and purchase a lap top computer. It was decided that as of 1st January 2019 a membership fee of \$20.00 per annum is to come into force. Members were advised in social Media as well as in the Orderly Room Gossip Report. [in parenthesis; since this date receipts for membership have been limited to less than 50 people. This has been disappointing considering we have 219 people on the membership roll, including veterans and widows]

**ASSOCIATION CONSTITUTION.** A discussion paper was tabled at with the AGM with the intention of bringing the rules up to date including the necessity to incorporate. It expected that in the next meeting a proposal will be decided upon to be voted upon at the 2020 A.G.M. If you would like a copy of the discussion paper, please contact me.

**ANZAC DAY 2019:** At the meeting the 2019 ANZAC Day Planning for Anzac Day 2019 and lunch was finalised. Thanks to Rob for his efforts in having Land Rovers available for the veterans. Ray marched the full length of the march. Well done Ray. Thank you to Margaret Perry who arranged the reunion lunch.

**PNG PILGRIMAGE:** The descendant's pilgrimage to PNG in May was an extraordinary success. Thanks go to Rob Denny and David Howell of Kokoda Historical. We hope similar pilgrimages will occur in future. Have a look at the dedication ceremony on the website where the village boss Ananias with the PNG High Commissioner unveiled the new memorial.

**SANANANDA DAY 2019 ARRANGEMENTS.** Planning is well under way for Saturday 7<sup>th</sup> December. Make sure that you arrive at the Cenotaph before 1045hrs for the parade at 1100hrs. Attached is the reunion luncheon booking form. Please ensure that if you are coming, we have your details early.

**ORDERLY ROOM GOSSIP:** In this edition we include some excerpts from Clarrie James ANGAU One MAN LAW. Originally of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion Clarrie was transferred to the 53<sup>rd</sup> Battalion prior to in the move from Sydney to Port Moresby. He was an Orderly Room soldier in the 53<sup>rd</sup> Bn. Clarrie and a number of 53<sup>rd</sup> battalion soldiers successfully transferred to ANGAU [Australian New Guinea Administrative Unit]. The loss of these more experienced soldiers had negative effects later on when the 53<sup>rd</sup> Battalion was sent up the Kokoda Track.

### BOOK REVIEW

Larrikins in Khaki; Tales of irreverence and courage from World War II Diggers by Tim Bowden



From recruitment and training and the battlegrounds of Palestine, North Africa, Thailand, Burma and beyond, here are the highly individual stories of Australia's World War II Diggers told in their own voices - warts and all.

With a reputation for being hard to discipline, generosity to their comrades, frankness and sticking it up any sign of pomposity, Australian soldiers were a wild and irreverent lot, even in the worst of circumstances during World War II.

In Larrikins in Khaki, Tim Bowden has collected compelling and vivid stories of individual soldiers whose memoirs were mostly self-published and who told of their experiences with scant regard for literary pretensions and military niceties. Most of these men had little tolerance for military order and discipline, and NCOs and officers who were hopeless at their jobs were made aware of it. They laughed their way through the worst of it by taking the mickey out of one another and their superiors.

From recruitment and training to the battlegrounds of Palestine, North Africa, Thailand, New Guinea, Borneo and beyond, here are the highly individual stories of Australia's World War II Diggers told in their own voices - warts and all. Tim Bowen is a former ABC Radio host and an oral

historian. Available at all good bookshops Publisher Allen & Unwin RRP \$32.99



# ORDERLY ROOM *Gossip*



## A descendant's report

**55<sup>th</sup> 53<sup>rd</sup> Descendants paid homage to our ancestors by undertaking an eight day trek commencing on the 11<sup>th</sup> May till 18<sup>th</sup> May 2019.**

**Day 1.** 22 intrepid travellers arose early to catch a plane out of Sydney to Brisbane, where we traversed through immigration before catching our ongoing flight to Port Moresby. On arrival in Port Moresby we were transported via bus to our accommodation the 5 star Grand Papua Hotel, where we would be staying for 3 nights. Happy hour was definitely on the schedule.

After settling in, we gather again for a formal detailed presentation on the battles fought in Papua during 1942 by our guide David Howell followed by a 2 course dinner before retiring.

**Day 2.** Another early rise, breakfast at 06:00 before leaving on the bus at 08:00, this journey would see us travelling along the Sogeri Highway to Owers Corner via McDonalds Corner. Here we ventured down the track to the "Goldie River" before returning back up the track. Although only a small distance it was enough to know the hardship our diggers had to endure with limited supplies and full packs.

We then travelled to Koitaki to view the area of the infamous "rabbit that run speech". We also met up with some locals with interesting stories to tell.

After lunch we visited the PNG National Memorial, PNG Museum and Parliament, as well as observing, the "wreck of the M.V. MacDhui, then back to the hotel for dinner.



**Day 3.** Today is a more sombre event for we are heading for the 'Bomana Cemetery' a National War Grave Site, where David gave us a wealth of knowledge about those who had given the ultimate sacrifice, a commemorative service was held where a wreath was laid on behalf of the battalion by Beverley Dawson and Port Moresby RSL Sub Branch President, after lunch we visited a nature park which was full of birds, animals and flowers that are unique to PNG, then back to the hotel to freshen up for dinner,

**Day 4** After an early breakfast and picking up our pre packed lunch we were transferred to the domestic airport for our flight to Kokoda flying over the Kokoda track, Lake Myola, Brigade Hill and Isurava and arriving on the same wartime airfield at Kokoda. After lunch we visited Bert Kienzle Museum and the Kokoda Memorial.

At the Kokoda Arches we had an opportunity to walk the Kokoda end of the track.

Heading back to the village we passed the Kokoda war time hospital. At the Kokoda village we would stay for 1 night although crude, rough and a plumber's nightmare, we were made to feel welcome and we survived to tell the tale.

**Day 5** Today we say goodbye to Kokoda and set out on our big blue troop carrier with padded seat for comfort "HAHA" heading north we stop at Oivi and Gorari Memorial, crossed the bridge on the Kumusi River where our diggers first encounter the Japanese, further along the way we visited the Martyrs Bush Church (Christ the King) and school then on to Popondetta to stop for lunch PIZZA ALL AROUND visit Popondetta War Memorial before picking up supplies before heading for on the beachheads.

When travelling in a troop carrier even with a padded seat the journey is not recommended for anyone with back problems as the road is non-existent or should I say pot holes big enough to swallow a mini, water holes that you could swim in and undergrowth that any farmer would be proud of it, if it could be eaten, and an occasional pig.

Arriving at Gona there was three (3) speed boats waiting to take us to Sanananda, here the games began as we raced to see who would arrive first, Another, bumpy ride but we did stay dry.

On arrival at Sanananda we were greeted with a ceremonial welcome from the natives in the form of dance with beating drums and chants. The accommodation was an improvement and the shower worked although cold and the toilet flushed.

**Day 6** Waking up to the sound of waves was an unusual experience considering most of us are from inland, Pancakes for breakfast this morning with a good hot cup of tea and coffee. After breakfast we were loaded into the speed boats and travelled to Buna. Here we observed the last known Japanese bunkers, the Australian and American Memorials, before returning to Sanananda we took a short walk via the legendary road in the famous George Silk photograph.

Upon our arrival in Sanananda we caught up with the delegation party that had earlier arrived that consisted of Bruce Davis, Australian High Commissioner to PNG, Colonel James Kidd, Australian Defence Force Staff PNG and many local dignitaries.



The combined parties travelled across the lagoon to the Sanananda War Grave Memorial for a short service. The site now has 3 memorial plaques:-

1. 55<sup>th</sup> /53<sup>rd</sup> Battalion that was laid by our diggers on a return visit in 1973
2. 1/24
3. 55<sup>th</sup> 53<sup>rd</sup> Battalion that was dedicated—unveiled on our trip in 2019

Margaret Perry and Ray Gentles laid the wreath on behalf of all descendants.





Village children sang PNGs National Anthem and then we sang the Australian National Anthem, the children won hands down in harmonious notes of pride.

Following lunch, we took a short walk around the local Sanananda war areas, seeing the Wirraway wreck, Japanese hospital and craft market, on our return several members took advantage of the warm Solomon Sea and ventured in for a refreshing swim.

**Day 7** Up early we load on to the troop carrier making our way to Girua Airport. After a short flight we arrive back in Port Moresby and onto the Grand Papua Hotel for the last night of our trek.

**Day 8** Sadly our trek comes to an end as we transfer back to the international airport for our flight back home in Australia.

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### **Acknowledgments:**

Without the care and dedication of the people of Sanananda who have for many decades cared for and protected the battleground site and its memory within their culture; it would not be possible to visit the site of battleground. To Annaeanus, his wife and son Frank and their extended family for their hospitality and friendship, we say a profound word of thanks. Thank you!

We sincerely thank Beverley Dawson for sharing the story of the pilgrimage to PNG . To Rob Denny for his photographs [many more can be viewed in the mice of Moresby facebook page]. Rob's determination and commitment is sincerely appreciated in ensuring the trip to PNG would be an outstanding success. Also without his extraordinary planning his historical knowledge his care and friendship towards all who joined this pilgrimage, we sincerely thank David Howell and his staff of Kokoda Historical.



## **ANGAU ONE MAN LAW; by Clarrie James [Clarence Roy]**

Australian Military History Publications, 1999 ISBN 1-876439-66-1

### **Chapter 1 INNOCENTS ABROAD**

Chaos? In the dying hours of Christmas Day, 1941, the 53<sup>rd</sup> Militia Battalion was in a state of chaos brought about by a series of bungles. It came to a head when 275 of the Unit's 800 troops failed to answer Roll Call at 10pm. Although the Commanding Officer was not bound by the formalities of a leave pass, he, too, had not returned at that hour. A case of, "Don't do as I do. Do as I command."

In itself, the failure of a third of the Battalion to return from leave was serious enough, but worse, those who had granted the leave knew that the Unit was on notice to embark for overseas the next day: something of which the troops were completely unaware. Those events and the applications for exception from military service, disruption of training, the last-minute induction of raw recruits immediately prior to sailing and the shortage of equipment, were to have disastrous consequences for many of my comrades. It is possible that the circumstances caused a later unnecessary loss of life, and undermined the performance of the Battalion on the battlefield.

The 53<sup>rd</sup> Battalion was not a unit founded in the conventional manner, based upon a region where men knew each other in civilian life or had met previously in training. The unit was formed by drafting a number of troops from different areas until the numbers added up to the strength of an infantry battalion. Between October and early November 1941, 800 men were redrafted from 18 units and it was suggested a few commanding officers had taken the opportunity to rid themselves of trouble makers. I was one of about thirty men transferred from the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, based on the Canberra – Goulburn area on 28<sup>th</sup> October 1941, to help form what was purported to be the future Darwin Garrison Battalion.

On the night of 27<sup>th</sup> October 1941, we assembled at the Canberra Railway Station for transport by train to Sydney. En route we were joined by others from Queanbeyan, Goulburn and Moss Vale. Upon arrival at Central Railway we were given breakfast and then taken to Moore Park Army Depot. There we were subjected to a number of formalities including a medical examination. ...

We travelled by train and truck to Ingleburn Army Camp, where we found, much to our surprise, that we were among some of the first to arrive. The next day I was posted to Battalion Headquarter as an orderly room clerk. Apart from drafting and typing correspondence, my main duty was the production of Routine Orders: the means of relaying instructions and information to the whole of the Battalion. Subsequently, Les [Yokka] Easton, a fellow orderly room clerk, and I were promoted to Lance Corporal with the promise by the CO of further promotion later.

As the numbers grew, companies were formed and soon there was much yelling in the 'bull-ring': the parade ground adjacent to Battalion Headquarters. The source of the bellowing was the Sergeant-Major who was drilling the new recruits. I was not impressed and quite glad that my duties exempted me from his bullying.

About this time, too much of our conversations revolved around Darwin and when we would be going there. Most of us were excited at the prospect of the coming adventure and settled down to prepared ourselves for departure. Unfortunately, more than a hundred of our battalion members applied for exemption from military service. A great deal of the C.O.'s time and the time of others, was taken up hearing the applications with the subsequent disruption of training.

[A large section concerning Christmas and travelling to Sydney board troop ships omitted here]

Christmas is expected to be a time of joy but it turned out into a night of shame. It was a night of shame for those who had authorised leave in the given circumstances. As the C.O. had received verbal orders from higher authority on other occasions I like to think now that he was not responsible for the lack of such foresight. It was a night of shame for those who failed to return at the appointed hour or within a reasonable time thereafter. It was a night of shame for the way in which new recruits were 'shanghaied' to fill gaps created by those who remained absent without leave. Finally, it was a night of shame and an indictment of those who had allowed this nation to be totally unprepared for its defence. ...

On that Christmas night the precincts of Battalion Headquarters were bedlam. First, we needed to establish our unit strength and when this was found to be deficient young men, many of whom had been civilian in the previous week, were brought in as a matter of urgency. They came from the nearby Darwin Details Depot, as reinforcements to fill vacancies created by the absentees – right on embarkation time. Many were without uniforms when it came to final numbers. ...

## **Chapter 2 - DESTINATION WITH A DIFFERENCE**

'Bloody Cook's tourists', bystanders jibed. "You'll be sorry," others called, as our detachment of 221 boarded the Blue Funnel Line SS Sarpedon on the morning of Saturday, 27 December 1941. The majority of the men of our battalion embarked on the HMT Aquitania, the former luxury liner of the Atlantic.



When others close to me said, "were off to Darwin," I had to stop myself from blurting out, "No we're not – its Port Moresby." I was one of the privileged few who knew our destination and, as my Commanding Officer had sworn me to secrecy. I remained silent.

Once on board, Yokka Easton and I secured a two birth cabin, stowed our gear and then explored the ship. 219 others seemed to have the same idea. With so few on board, the cabins and berths were ample to accommodate us. The canteen was wet and the English crew would prepare our meals from ships stores and serve

them to us in the passenger's saloon. We were indeed Cooks tourists.

The 3000 troops on the Aquitania were not so fortunate as they competed for space. It was a troop ship, not a luxury passenger liner and most slept in hammocks or on deck. Their canteen was dry and the units cooks prepared meals using army rations as ingredients. They even had rifle drill when the 104 new recruits of the 53<sup>rd</sup> Battalion had in their hands .303 Lee Enfield for the first time. In contrast, ours was a pleasure cruise except for two essential differences. The Sarpedon's holds were filled with bombs, ammunition, and petrol and the enemy lurking out there was interested in seeing we did not complete our journey. ...

[as space does not allow, the reader is urged to get a copy for themselves to read. My copy cost \$4.00 at a second hand bookshop]. Clarrie died on 13 February 2010. Thank you Clarrie.

Photo: SS Sarpedon at Liverpool Docks circa 1930's

Source: [https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/1/19/SS\\_Sarpedon.JPG](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/1/19/SS_Sarpedon.JPG)

The following poem written by a POW was passed onto Wal Molloy by one of his mates when he was a patient at Lady Davidson Repatriation Hospital. [from the Orderly Room Gossip Vol. 4 1995]

## MATES

by Cliff Burkitt

I've travelled down some lonely Roads,  
Both crooked Tracks and straight,  
An' I've learned life's noblest creed,  
Summed up in one word ---- "Mate".

I'm thinking back across the Years,  
(A thing I do of late),  
An' this word sticks between 'me 'ears,  
You've got to have a "Mate".

Me mind goes back to '43.  
To slavery an' 'ate,  
When Man's one chance to stay alive,  
Depended on 'is "Mate".

With Bamboo for a Billy Can,  
An' Bamboo for a Plate,  
A Bamboo Paradise for Bugs,  
Was Bed for me an' me "Mate".

You'd slip and slither through the Mud,  
An' curse your rotten fate,  
But then you'd 'ear a quiet word,  
Don't drop your bundle "Mate".

An' though it's all so long ago,  
This truth I 'Ave to state,  
A Man don't know what lonely means,  
Til'e 'as lost 'is "Mate".

If there's a 'Golden Gate',  
The Welcome that I want to 'ear,  
Is just 'Good on y' 'Mate',  
An' so to all who ask us why?,  
We keep these special dates.  
Like Anzac Day, I answer Why?'  
We're thinkin' of our "Mates".

An' when I've left the Drivers Seat,  
An' handed in me plates, I'll tell ol' Peter at the Door,  
I've come to join me "Mates".