



The Apprentice About

Newsletter for the Australian Army Apprentices Association Inc

Volume 1, Issue 4

Sep 2011

From the President

We've had our last full committee meeting before we go to our Annual General Meeting in October in Canberra. The committee meeting was held at Bandiana, on the 30th July. We appreciated being given access to space to hold our meeting in the Borella Club building at Gaza Ridge Barracks. We ate in the OR's Mess and were considerably better looked after than the majority of us remember OR's messes. We were a source of some curiosity amongst the serving men and women who shared the line up at the servery windows with us. Might have had something to do with our average age approaching sixty and perhaps something about our general condition which would not have served us well on a 0.1km run.

AGM. This AGM will of course be part of the October event in Canberra and I invite you to attend that meeting if you can. All of our members and recipients of this letter will receive formal notice of the meeting in due course but I thought you might like to know that one of the key items that will be addressed is a motion to make some changes to your Constitution. Don't forget you are at liberty to appoint a proxy for the AGM and the forms are on the website. www.austarmyapprentice.org.au

Constitutional Review

The original constitution was drafted by Frank Poole and the document has served us well since inception. The environment in which we operate as an incorporated association has changed a bit and the Committee felt that some of the operational provisions needed an update. Jeff Heron and his team were *(continued)*

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

- 1/2 From the President
- 1 Membership Matters
- 3 Calendar of Events/Notice of AGM/Memorial Update
- 4 - 8 Short Stories
- 9 AAAA Committee
- 9 Looking for

AUSTRALIAN ARMY APPRENTICES ASSOCIATION INCORPORATED

ACT Incorporation No A04404

GPO Box 2072, CANBERRA, ACT, 2601

www.austarmyapprentice.org

Patron: Lieutenant General Ken Gillespie, AC, DSC, CSM, Chief of Army (Retd)



Membership Matters

The AAAA membership is growing steadily and we currently have 589 members.

One thing I have noticed in processing the membership applications and renewals is that there does appear to be some confusion regarding the definition of **Ordinary** and **Retired** members.

Memberships are defined as follows:

Ordinary Member: Any person who enlisted into the Australian Army, with the rank of Apprentice and was allocated a class intake number, and attended the Army Apprentices School at Balcombe or Bonegilla or the Army College of TAFE at Bonegilla.

Retired Member: Any person satisfying the above requirement for member who is now no longer working full time, or is drawing a DVA, Age or TPI pension. Special cases shall be considered by the Vice-president.

Associate (or Associate Member): Any other person who has been associated with a Service Apprentice Training Scheme.

Craig Malcolm (31st ET)

Membership Secretary

Membership@austarmyapprentice.org



charged with collating suggestions from the Committee and bringing proposed changes back to the Committee. The overall structure and major provisions that formed part of Frank Poole's original document have remained unchanged but there are changes needed to some clauses that we thought were needed to make the Association more administratively efficient. You will receive notice of these in another document ahead of the AGM.

Committee Business

Sub Committees

The Committee received reports from the two Sub Committee's (The Memorial Sub Committee and The Balcombe Sub Committee).

The Memorial Sub Committee is chaired by Frank Poole and for the time being I continue to Chair the Balcombe Sub Committee. In both cases the work of the sub committees is progressing quite well. Much of the Memorial activity is focused upon maintaining the Memorial which in the main has fallen to Jim Hislop to manage with the support of the Museum. We are very grateful that Jim is active in that area. The memorial is a static memorial but is now 3 years old and, like everything that is open to the elements, it has to be maintained.

At Balcombe, the project to put in place a Heritage Site is progressing and the rededication of the site is scheduled to be one of our major events in 2012. We're receiving heaps of support from the Mornington Peninsula Shire Council and Staff and they recently added another \$2,000 to our fundraising. We now have \$12,000 in hand and need about the same again to complete the job. The saving grace is that we're managing and sharing the project with the three other schools; Signals, Survey and Music which all occupied the site in the past and we're looking to them and a number of other units to 'kick in'. We are confident that although we may have to do a bit of drum banging we will close the gap.

Financials

We're in pretty good shape at the moment with around \$45,000 on hand. Bearing in mind that our bank balance includes \$10,000 term deposit and the general account has been boosted in recent times by the inflow of funds for the October Event.

The Benzene Project

The Committee came to the conclusion that we have gone about as far as we can with the resources that we have on this project. Jock McWhinney initiated the project when it appeared that a significant number of the older intakes were falling victim to exposure to benzene during their training and in later service. We will collate the information received and pass that on to a more appropriately resourced organisation.

Resignations from the Committee

Regrettably we noted the resignation from the Committee of Geoff Martin and Mike Farrar.

Geoff Martin, who served in Korea was recently hosted back to Korea with a number of other Korean Veterans. He answered in the affirmative when I asked him if he was up to doing it all again; but on reflection he thought he couldn't manage both that and the Committee work now so the Committee work would have to go. Geoff will continue to receive the material coming from the Balcombe Sub Committee which he chaired until last year. We wish both Geoff and Mary safe passage and thank them for their contribution to the Association.

Mike Farrar also tendered his resignation for reasons associated with his 'other' role as a welfare officer for the RSL. I am also sorry to lose Mike from the Committee because his efforts were directed at working up an Intake liaison roll. That's a little more difficult than it sounds and Mike's contribution was much appreciated.

New Secretary

On a brighter note I am very pleased to advise you that Neil Bennett (13th) has willed under a sustained campaign by the other members of the Committee (and me) to take on the role of Secretary of the Association. I thank him for accepting the position and also thank Val, Neil's very talented wife, for her forbearance in the matter as well. Our wives are inevitably caught up in the to and fro of the Association.

I have approached our Vice President (Lucas McGann - 35th) to oversee the work of the Balcombe Sub Committee. Lucas runs a substantial electrical contracting business and his on site experience will be of use; to say nothing of the fact that he is much closer to Balcombe than I am.

Post Script

I would like to thank those members that have replied to the previous "letters from the president"; the feedback was sincerely appreciated and contained a lot of good information. I welcome any ideas you might have and look forward to hearing from you; good, bad or otherwise.

Barry

Barry Teal - President

president@austarmyapprentice.org

ps. I hope you have not forgotten that there are two vacancies on the Committee. There's no point in looking the other way. We all did "Clever ways to avoid volunteering 101", and those tricks will not work at the AGM.



CALENDAR OF EVENTS - REUNIONS

Do you have a reunion or event that you would like to announce to the membership?. If so, please let us know.

Apprentices Together - 2011 Reunion

Time is running out to register to attend the 2011 that will be held in Canberra over the period **27th – 31st October 2011**

The Association, in recognising that the Intakes were and still are the bonding focus of the AAS, intends to provide a "function umbrella", so that intakes are able to conduct individual reunions, and at the same time come together in a display of combined mateship from days past to the present. This gathering will cover four days and provide the flexibility that will allow the Intakes to do their own thing, plus plenty of time to enjoy all that Canberra has to offer for visitors. The Association will organise key functions to ensure that the reunion maintains its momentum, purpose and solidarity. A draft breakdown of the daily events can be found on the website.

For more information contact Frank Maloney, the Association Events Manager (frmal@bigpond.com) and watch the web page at <http://www.austarmyapprentice.org/armyapprenticestogether2011.html>

Notice of AGM

The **2011 Annual General Meeting** of the Australian Army Apprentices Association Inc. will be held at the Southern Cross Club, Woden at **1000 hours on Saturday 29th October 2011**. All members are asked to attend and partners would be welcome.

The AGM documents will be made available at the Association website www.austarmyapprentice.org within the next few weeks or so:

Please note that any additional agenda items should be forwarded to the Secretary ASAP as an email attachment and be in the form of a seconded motion with a brief discussion of the motion.

Positions Vacant:

The following positions on the committee will be declared vacant:

- (1) the President,
- (2) the Secretary,
- (3) the Events Manager,
- (4) the Heritage Officer,
- (5) the Webmaster,
- (6) three (3) of the Ordinary Committee Members.

Army Apprentices Memorial Update

The memorial has always been intended to be a "living memorial", meaning that it will be used by Apprentices over the years to perpetuate their memories of Apprentices School, recognising trades, intakes and mates, in memorial of specific departed loved ones and in recognising in particular those Apprentices lost in action.

Unfortunately, a living memorial also involves maintenance and repair. Already our gates are growing rust blisters and rabbits and kangaroos are scattering soil over the pavement. The gates are being removed so that they can be sandblasted and powder coated. We are building up the sides of the flower beds to prevent soil being scattered onto the pavement. We have Jim Hislop, Charlie and Capt. Phil Craig and his Museum staff to thank for looking after these issues.

Several new pavers, memory bronze plaques and a memorial plaque have now been added to the Memorial, with more pavers and memory plaques due to be installed soon.

The Memorial Wall to be erected behind the gates, which will have mounted the Apprentice KIA plaque that RAEME have kindly allowed relocation from the RAEME memorial, has been put on hold as funds have had to be allocated for the preservation of the gates.

Frank Poole

Chairman, Apprentice Memorial Sub-committee



How I got to Balcombe - Peter Radford. 13th. Fitter and Turner



I used to be a good student up to and including my second year of high school, then the pleasure and freedom of catching a train and bus in the mornings and being so far away from home it became easier and easier to just skip school for the day and stroll the streets of Adelaide, Port Adelaide and sometimes take the “city” kids back to the hills above Salisbury and show them the sights.

We lived in Salisbury North, South Australia at this time; a new housing estate some 15 miles north of Adelaide. Such a long way it seemed back then. I came from a large family and my mother was busy raising my young siblings while my father worked at Maralinga during the atomic test era. That left a lot of freedom for this fifteen year old and high school was at the bottom of my interest list. I was a “First Class” Senior Boy Scout, played football for the local junior team and a Sergeant in the School Army Cadet unit so I led a very active life. School, however, was not a high priority as I said and subjects were fairly easy for me but the third year I started to get left behind.

My form master, Mr. Pritchard, was a tough, ex-world war 2 RAAF officer, but a fair man and he and I had a heart to heart talk one day after I had applied to enter the Army Apprentices School located at Balcombe, Victoria. There were five students who had submitted applications so I thought my chances were slim. Mr. Pritchard confided he was not going to sign off on my application as he thought I did not deserve his endorsement having skipped too many classes to be academically acceptable. I was devastated but knew I deserved the punishment. He went on to say and best as I can recall, “However I have made enquiries and it appears the discipline is very strong, you have to attend class and lectures, and therefore I have signed this document. Now get it to the Headmaster before I change my mind.”

Now all I had to do was attend the interview sessions. My father and the school had both signed my application, so it appeared I was at the last hurdle. The interview was my first ever for a real job or position and there was a team of heavies on the far side of the table; I was later to recognise the Commanding Officer and Regimental Sergeant Major of the school among the interviewers. But no! The hardest part was WAITING to hear from the Army.

I worked during the weeks leading up to Christmas for the Post Office (PMG at the time) delivering parcels and packages helping out the local postman (Mailman). After I was finished I had to accompany the postman on his rounds to learn the art, I guess, of stuffing letters into slots. One day as we approached my house the postie handed me our letters, mum was standing waiting at the front gate as she had heard the whistle coming down the street. Mum said, “Here Pete this one’s for you.” And there it was in a khaki coloured Commonwealth of Australia, Department of Army envelope. With shaking hands I finally had the letter out and the words, “We are pleased to inform you.....etc., never sounded so good.

I am the first to admit I was a bad student in my final year at school and I have never forgotten the day Mr. Jack Pritchard signed my paper work. I had promised my parents I would do well at the Apprentices School and finally, after a rough first year trade wise, in my second and graduating year I kept that promise. As funny as it seems now, the education courses we had to endure were no problem to me at all. Mathematics became easy and as we had to memorise every thread cutting and thirty two gear cutting formulae for the final exams it was just as well.

The Army was good to me and Balcombe forged strong discipline and made adulthood and a life’s career in the earthmoving and mining industry around the world possible. I and many others feel it is time to reintroduce the Apprentice’s scheme into the modern Army albeit with differences to adapt to today’s operational requirements.





The following is an extract from John Bremner's (17th Clerk) manuscript "Boy Soldier", on his first day at Balcombe in January 1962.

We arrived at the entrance to Balcombe Army Camp and took a circuitous route through a maze of tin sheds of varying sizes before coming to a stop outside one of the smaller sheds. I don't think any of us were prepared for the huge size of the Camp, and any dreams I had that Balcombe would resemble a boarding school similar to Scotch College where my father went as a boy were certainly dashed.

In addition to the Army Apprentice School, the Royal Australian Signals Corps and the Army Survey Corps also had training complexes at Balcombe and, by the look of the buildings, I don't think much had changed since 1942 when the 1st Division of the US Marine Corps were stationed at Balcombe for rest and refit following the battle of Guadalcanal – some estimates state up to 25,000 troops were stationed here in WW2 and, going by the size of the Camp, this figure is quite feasible. Years later, after reading accounts of what the Marines went through at Guadalcanal, I regarded it as an honour to have lived in the same huts as the Marines.

After debussing, a Warrant Officer, ably assisted by a couple of snarling Sergeants, somehow managed to sort our rabble into three groups representing the various trades – these three groups were to be allocated to huts in either A, B or C Company. Clerks were put with motor mechanics in A Company, radio technicians, fitters and turners, carpenters & joiners, plumbers, bricklayers, blacksmiths, electricians and musicians were assigned to either 'B' or 'C' Company. Clerks were to complete eighteen months at Balcombe, musicians two years and the rest of the trades three years. Counting the 15th, 16th and 17th intakes, there were just over 300 Apprentices at Balcombe when I joined. After much loud yelling and frustrated exclamations from our new guardians, we were assembled on the road for what was to be the first of thousands of Army roll-calls during my service. Names were called out in quick succession with responses of "here, present" and "sir" from obviously ex-army cadets or perhaps just natural brown-noses until it came to a kid who replied "over here, mate" – this stopped the Warrant Officer in his tracks. Poor bugger, this lapse of common sense was not entirely his fault but that of copious amounts of alcohol consumed on a flight from Kalgoorlie to Adelaide thence to Melbourne. Why an obviously under-age kid was served alcohol is anybody's guess, but for their efforts Terry was rewarded with cleaning out a grease trap behind one of the mess halls; he told me later he was probably filling it up as quickly as he emptied it.

Following roll-call, we were marched off in loose formation to A Company; then in turn to a hut within the Company. If you are not familiar with Army-speak, back in 1962, soldiers were grouped in succession into a platoon, company, battalion and so forth. Our group was assigned to 3 Platoon within 'A' Company – no battalions here. Regular Army personnel were in charge of each Company. For example, Company Sergeant Major, a Sergeant or Staff Sergeant and a Corporal or two. A hierarchy of Apprentices were appointed/promoted to apprentice non-commissioned officer ranks to assist the Regulars in maintaining discipline and good order.

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North Queensland Area Rep Report

For this issue of the Apprentice About, I thought I would do a little human interest story.

In sunny Cairns, Pat English (24th F&T) and owner of English Engineering, has been building a replica full size Spitfire. Pat and a mate have been building two planes as part of an ongoing project lasting five years. The first plane completed which belongs to Pat's mate, has a single seat and has flown (see photos below). Pat is trying to get his plane painted and hopes to run it up in the next few weeks, although I think Yasi may have put a bit of a dampener on this. Some of the technical details of Pat's Spitfire, which he is naming the Balcitraz Banshee with an association badge on its nose, are:

- Two seat;
- Fitted with a 350 HP Lycoming T10 540 engine which is expected to give him a speed of 180 to 200 knots;
- It is constructed from aluminium with the same dimensions and look as the original;
- The plane is constructed totally differently from the original and uses all new components;
- Registration is the same as a normal aircraft, under the experimental class;
- The cost of a completed aircraft is expected to be in the vicinity of \$500,000 depending on the level of outfitting and components fitted; and
- It can be flown under a private pilots' licence.

Part of the aim of Pat's project is to get together a homebuilders kit for sale to the public. If you are interested, I recommend you get in contact with Pat. Additionally, this aircraft is not the same as supplied by a company in Brisbane which sells scale model spitfires.

Good luck and well done to Pat for this excellent and very interesting project.

The photos below show different stages of the build.



The start of the project



350 HP Lycoming T10
540 engine



Almost ready to go to the
painters



The cockpit



Pat's mates plane ready to
fly



Pat (right) ready to fly his
mate's plane



The Army Apprentices School Balcombe The First Commanding Officer – Colonel F.B. Oldfield

Frederick Berman Oldfield (aka Barney), was a soldier and officer with a very interesting career. He was born in Melbourne on the 19th September 1897 and enlisted in the Australian Imperial Forces (AIF) on the 13th October 1916 at 19 years of age. His civilian occupation was listed as a trainee school teacher and his enlistment application shows he had 4 years service with the school cadets.

He served with number of artillery units as a Gunner and Lance Bombardier and served in France where he was listed as wounded in action with gas poisoning and after 6 weeks recovering in a hospital at Southampton he returned to the front in France. His total service with the AIF was 2 years and 322 days of which 2 years and 112 days were shown as being service abroad. He took his discharge in London UK on the 30th August 1919 and he received an amount of 16 pounds Aust being his deferred pay for the period. He was awarded the British War Medal and the Victory Medal. After discharge he remained in the UK where he gained university degrees in Science & Education. His first teaching job was at Trenton on Sea, a private grammar school.

He returned to Australia in 1925, married and spent some time as a resident master at St Peters College Adelaide and later at the Ballarat Senior Grammar School. He also taught at the Scots College Melbourne. He enlisted in the Citizen Military Forces in 1931 and a few years later moved to Sydney where he found employment as the sub editor for the ABC.

He again re-enlisted in the AIF on the 6th January 1941 and with the rank of Lt was to serve with the 1st Advanced Ordnance Workshop in the Middle East. He was promoted to Capt in March 1941 and continued with this unit until March 1942 he was sent to the South West Pacific until March 1944.

He was an early member of AEME then later RAEME and at the end of WW2 he decided to return to civilian life with his rank at that time being T/LtCol. He was awarded 1939/45 Star, Africa Star, Pacific Star, Defence Medal and the Aust Service Medal.

Prior to WW2 it was found that a situation had developed where it was not possible to enlist sufficient tradesmen for the army's requirement. An early scheme was evolved for the training of apprentices who were attached to large army workshops and attended civil technical colleges but after the war period, in an area of expanding industry and full employment, competition for skilled labour and trainable youth was more acute than ever. It then became evident that a more comprehensive training scheme was required.

The document setting out the case for the establishment of a military technical training school (Mil Board Agendum 173/1947) was presented under the signature of LtGen S.F. Rowell VCGS and it was discussed at a Military Board meeting of 29th October 1947. The Minister for the Army (Hon Cyril Chambers) gave his approval and within 3 months the school was in motion.

In the meantime LtCol F.B. Oldfield with 8 years experience in 2 world wars as a technical officer, was appointed the first Commanding Officer of the new Army Apprentices School (AAS) on 7th December 1947. He immediately became involved in the whole planning process with the priority on locating a suitable site that was isolated enough from other camps and depots for adult soldiers but not too far away from a city.

In view of the limited range of choices it was found that Balcombe on the Mornington Peninsula had much of what was wanted. It was 58km from Melbourne, sufficiently isolated and with only two army schools already established in the area. LtCol Oldfield moved to Balcombe as the CO in February 1948.

Selection of the apprentices began in May and on the 2 August the 1st intake of apprentices moved into the camp. The camp at this period was badly run down and it needed renovating, maintenance and extensions, likewise trained staff and equipment were in extremely short supply. The opening of the new school before accommodation and equipment was prepared and before instructors had been provided was a bold move. There was initially no furniture or floor coverings supplied to cater for the 80 members of the 1st intake.

LtCol Oldfield argued that an early opening would give impetus to its completion as a going concern and the securing of the necessary staff and it was accepted that a good deal of self help by the first few intakes would be necessary. This self help was referred to as "practical training" and the apprentices were tasked with all manner of tasks as painting buildings, digging drains and road work to name a few.



Times were tough in the early years and resources were scarce but when LtCol Oldfield handed over command of the AAS to LtCol C. Ives during July 1952, he had achieved excellent results that had established the foundations for a school that supplied the army with tradesmen and tradeswomen for some 46 years. He was described as a wise and humble man with many varied talents who was prepared to take whatever steps necessary to ensure the initial success of the AAS.

In September 1952 LtCol Oldfield resigned from the army for the third time with the rank of Honorary Colonel and, to make use of his previous journalistic skills, he became the editor of the "Mornington Post" for some years before returning to a teaching role at Mosman NSW TAFE until his death in October 1962.

LtCol Oldfield (and his two daughters) were well remembered by all apprentice intakes up to, and including, the 7th intake, and it was not until late 1952 (and during the Korean War) that there were any actual real improvements made in the facilities for washing clothes or the toilets and showering areas used by the apprentices. It was a far cry from those normal everyday items provided in the latter years of Balcombe, and later at Bonegilla, that the early intakes had in their daily life as an Army Apprentice tradesman.



Mrs G. Chapman, a daughter of Col F.B. Oldfield - the first CO of the Army Apprentices School, presented a duplicate set of his medals and military insignia to the Army Museum Bandiana. The medals are beautifully mounted and are displayed next to the honour board of all the past CO's of the Army Apprentices School in the dedicated AAS memorabilia section of the museum.

Harry Cole 7th VM



AAAA COMMITTEE

POSITION	Appointment	POSITION	Appointment
Patron	Lieutenant General Ken J. Gillespie, AC, DSC, CSM (Retd)	Membership Secretary	Craig Malcolm
President	Barry Teal	Heritage Officer	Vacant
Vice President	Lucas McGann	Member	Vacant
Secretary	Neil Bennett	Member	Frank Pool
Treasurer	Owen Reynolds	Member	Glen Jones
Welfare Officer	Russell Evans	Member	Jeff Heron
Public Officer	Ray Wilson	Member	Bill Merton
Events Manager	Frank Maloney	Member	Jock McWhinney
Webmaster	Ian Morris	Memorabilia	Jack Westernhagen

Looking for:

Are you trying to track down old Appy mates, but don't see their name on our membership list. If you are looking for someone, let the membership secretary (membership@austarmyapprentice.org) know and their name and intake will be listed here.

If you know the whereabouts of any of the names listed, please get them to contact the Membership Secretary, and he will put them in contact with those seeking them.

Looking for: Graeme Balsillie - 11th Radio Mech

The Apprentice About is published Quarterly (or thereabouts).

If you have any contributions to this newsletter (which would be greatly appreciated) please send them to: membership@austarmyapprentice.org

Information, views or opinions expressed in "The Apprentice About" originates from many different sources and contributors throughout our membership. Please note that content does not necessarily represent or reflect the views and opinions of the AAAA