

Military Historical Society of Australia  
Victorian Branch Inc.

# Despatches



Quarterly Newsletter

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## Victorian Branch Inc. Committee 2010-11

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### Meetings Venue

Branch Meetings are held on the fourth Thursday of each month  
(except December) at the Oakleigh RSL, Drummond Street,  
Oakleigh starting at 8.00 pm. Visitors most welcome.

## Branch activities to the AGM

**27<sup>th</sup> January 2011.** January's member's own 'My Family Hero' proved to be a popular topic for the family historians as well as those who have 'just kept a few things'. Of 27 at the meeting, more than 20 wanted to talk, and a wide variety of interesting stories emerged.

**24<sup>th</sup> February 2011** was a joint session with our affiliated friends the Anglo-Boer War Study Group to listen to South African battlefield historian (and Vic. Branch member) Garth Benneyworth give a first class presentation on the battle in which Colonel C.E.E. Umphelby, commander of Victoria's artillery and the most senior Australian casualty of the war, was mortally wounded. Almost 40 attended.

Sponsored by us, Garth is now in discussion with the Museum at Fort Queenscliff, where Colonel Umphelby was stationed immediately before the Boer War, to provide Umphelby artefacts and battlefield history interpretation for a possible Umphelby exhibition and display.

**6<sup>th</sup> March** is the **Melbourne Cemetery Military Graves tour** run by Dr Gary Presland - spots are limited so contact VicSec if you want to go...

**24<sup>th</sup> March - Members Speak** - a double header from members Blake Shorthouse who will talk on '*Frontier Wars - on Hadrian's Wall*' for a bit of Roman military history, and Neil Smith who will talk about *Z Special Unit* in WWII following on the success of his book on the subject...

**28<sup>th</sup> April - Veterans' Night.** This night will be a cracker - three Vietnam veterans will give short but powerful insights into their war - Peter Gibson will talk about his experience with HQ Battery, 12<sup>th</sup> Artillery Regiment in 1971, US Sgt Ron Gates will tell of his role as a tunnel rat in CuChi province, and our own Allan Rantall will finish with his model of the tunnel systems that he 'worked' in that conflict.

**26<sup>th</sup> May - Bombing of Darwin and Japanese Plans for Australia.** A guest speaker (TBA). Did the Japanese actually planned to invade Australia?

**23<sup>rd</sup> June - 2<sup>nd</sup> Cobby Oration.** Commemorates the service of WWII and Korean veteran Commodore Dacre Smyth. The Oration will be given by the Senior Naval Officer in Victoria, Captain Mark Hill in the Mechanics Institute Hall across the road from the Oakleigh RSL. This will be our signature event of the year so we look to a big turnout by our Branch in support.

**28<sup>th</sup> July - AGM.** Election of office holders and committee members. Peter Beckett has signalled his intention not to stand again for Committee in 2011/12 as he will be away from Melbourne on travel for several months. Although he will stay on as Webmaster, we'd like to hear from anyone who can help out in that department while Peter is away - and we'll also need someone to help out with the audio-visual for presentations...**any volunteers please for July-November 2011?**

**New members.** We have been able to welcome two new members into the branch - Dr. Daryl Moran whose interest lies primarily with Australians in the RFC, and Ashley Mison, whose interest lies primarily in the occupation of Rabaul.

**New support.** The RSL has kindly agreed to give us the free use of their new projector and also their portable sound system to add a bit of volume to the presentations. Many thanks to Peter Beckett for supporting our meetings with his own projector for so long.

**Carnegie Room makeover.** The RSL has also agreed to allow us to 'manage' the Carnegie Room as our 'home'. Bill Black, Steve Gray and Robbie Dalton are working on specs to allow the RSL to bid for grant funds to put in lockable display cases. We'll then be able to put our own displays in safely and make the room a real MHSA room, even though it will of course be used by other groups from time to time. We'll have some say on the room decoration as well.

'fallen leaves' - our project book remains on sale and money goes into our funds so *please support your branch and buy a copy for just \$25* - contact any Committee member.

**Branch Website.** Keep engaged with our Branch website [www.mhsavictoria.com](http://www.mhsavictoria.com) to see all of the latest information on what's going on in the Branch.

### **The Emu War: *how Australia lost a war against birds***



The Emu War, also known as The Great Emu War, was a week-long military operation undertaken in Australia in November 1932 to address public concern over the number of emus said to be running amuck in the Campion district of Western Australia. The emus were responding to a long, hot summer, which caused shortages of food and water. The "war" was conducted under the command of Major Meredith of the Royal Australian Artillery, commanding a force of soldiers armed with two Lewis machine guns and 10,000 rounds of ammunition.

But shooting blindly into a group of birds which can run up to 50 km/h (30 mph) did not bring the expected results. The birds simply ran away even after being hit by a machine gun round. Over the course of a week or so, only a handful of the estimated 20,000 birds were actually killed. Major Meredith - the Australian commander in the "Emu war" - was astonished and famously compared the emus to Zulus. After a few days the Defence Minister ordered a withdrawal. And thus the "Emu War" ended in a military defeat for Australia.

Published <http://warbuff.wordpress.com>

**Biographical** - Biographies of interesting men and women with military interests; some permanent military, some militia, some Volunteers - who helped shape our military history.

**ULRICH, THEODORE FRIEDERICK** (1888-1963), soldier and clerk, was born on 10 December 1888 at Ararat, Victoria, son of German-born Augustus Charles Theodore Ulrich, stock agent, and his Irish wife Catherine, née Darling. He was the youngest of nine children, only five of whom survived to adulthood.

The family moved to Melbourne where Ulrich was educated at Carlton and Wesley colleges. He then worked for Connibere, Grieve & Connibere as a clerk, played cricket for a Carlton team and, aged 22, became a second lieutenant in the 1st Battalion, 6th Australian Infantry Regiment. In 1912 he joined the 63rd Infantry (East Melbourne) Regiment, as militia adjutant. On 14 August 1914 he was appointed lieutenant in the 6th Battalion, Australian Imperial Force, and embarked for Egypt on 19 October.

The battalion landed at Gallipoli on 25 April 1915; two days later Ulrich was promoted captain. For the next seven months he experienced the horrors and hardships of the peninsula before being evacuated sick on 22 November. He returned to his unit in February 1916 and sailed to France a month later, having been promoted major. In July he was appointed brigade major of the 2nd Brigade. He carried out his duties ably during the terrible Somme operations and was awarded the Distinguished Service Order late in 1916. From February to July 1917 he again gave 'conspicuous good service' to his brigade and was mentioned in dispatches.

On 6 July Ulrich became second-in-command of the 8th Battalion. On 20 October, during the 3rd battle of Ypres, he was wounded, but remained on duty. He returned to the 6th Battalion a few days later. His commanding officer, Lieutenant-Colonel Clarence Daly, was killed on 13 April 1918 near La Motte; next day Ulrich was appointed lieutenant-colonel with temporary command of the battalion. The allies' last great offensive was launched on 8 August; in the following two days Ulrich's battalion fought at Lihons, a battle which was, Ulrich confided to Charles Bean, 'a very heavy time' for the 6th. On the 23rd the unit fought near Herleville Wood. Despite heavy artillery and machine-gun fire, Ulrich

continually advanced with his troops, keeping closely in touch with his men and controlling their movements. Although the course of the battle at times became obscure, he was able to grasp situations and exploit opportunities. He was awarded a Bar to his D.S.O. By the time the war ended he had been thrice mentioned in dispatches.

After returning to Melbourne in May 1919, Ulrich commanded militia units [*including the 52<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Battalion an Oakleigh unit*] and worked at various jobs. In the mid-1920s he owned a butcher's shop and for a long time was an office-holder in the Victorian Automobile Chamber of Commerce. On 30 June 1926 he married Ida Violet Ferris at All Saints Anglican Church, St Kilda. With the outbreak of World War II Ulrich was given command of the 12th Australian Garrison Battalion at Broadmeadows. He led the unit until early 1945 when he retired from the army.

Thereafter Ulrich worked at several clerical, accounting and managerial positions. He joined the Brunswick sub-branch of the Returned Sailors', Soldiers' and Airmen's Imperial League of Australia in 1949 and occupied his spare time with golf, reading and carpentry. Survived by his wife and son, he died on 12 December 1963 at his Brunswick home and was cremated. In the words of a member of his family, Ulrich was 'at his best in the army and perhaps a little "out of place" in civilian life'.

Matthew Higgins, 'Ulrich, Theodore Friederick (1888 - 1963)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Volume 12, Melbourne University Press, 1990, p. 303.

### Quotable Quotations

**“Before a war military science seems a real science, like astronomy; but after a war it seems more like astrology”** *Rebecca West*

**“The warning message we sent the Russians was a calculated ambiguity that would be clearly understood.”** *Alexander Haig*

**“Nothing is so exhilarating in life as to be shot at with no result.”**  
*Winston Churchill*

**“Without supplies no army is brave”**  
*Frederick the Great, Instructions to his Generals 1747*

## Collector's Corner

### Mystery Objects

The last edition of *Despatches* showed these objects – called orthoptics, they are ocular aids to allow colonial and early Federation riflemen to be more accurate on the range. The militia and permanent army types of course were heavily critical, knowing they could not be used in the heat of battle. They called the rifle club men ‘pothunters’.



This button comes from a tunic of a gunner from the Williamstown Volunteer Artillery, late 19<sup>th</sup> Century – See Cossum, J.K., *Buttons of the Defence Forces of Australia*



### Helmets II



What sort of helmet is this, from what country and when?



GENERAL DOUGLAS MacARTHUR —Ptc. R. A. Cairns Cowan

## Women in the Air Force to 1947

In February 1941 authority was given to raise the Women's Auxiliary Australian Air Force (WAAAF) from its strength of 320. Accordingly, during World War II, the WAAAF grew to 27,000. There were also 632 Nursing Sisters. The initial intake was designed to meet a deficiency in the number of male wireless telegraphists, but it was soon evident that young women were keen and capable of undertaking other technical



tasks. At the end of the war, women were employed in 73 trades as diverse as fabric workers, photographers, engine fitters, clerks, cooks and meteorological assistants. Over 700 young women

were commissioned and employed in administrative and professional tasks. Women even commanded at least two RAAF radar units for short periods. Miss Clare Stevenson (later Group Officer) was appointed Director of the WAAAF in June 1941 and her inspiration and dedication was the basis for the success of the organisation.

In 1947 the WAAAF was demobilised, however, the value of women to the Service could not be denied and the Women's Royal Australian Air Force (WRAAF) was raised in 1950.

## Wargaming

### EXPEDITIONARY FORCE - BROADMEADOWS CAMP. THE WAR GAME.

Pinkland and Yellowland continued their long-drawn feud throughout the whole of yesterday. The Pinkland forces under the command of Lieutenant-Colonel Semmens made a vigorous attack on Thomastown station, the railway base of the Yellowland army. The Yellowland troops, under Lieutenant-Colonel Bolton's command, defended it with as much energy, and, as far as the eye could see, the sweeping paddocks were covered with little khaki infantrymen skirmishing over the open, and making frantic rushes for the nearest available cover. Along the roads, and behind the screen of the hedges by the wayside, they were moving along in more solid formation and from the high ground it almost seemed like some huge hand was playing a "war-game" with the brown battalions.

#### THE SECOND FORCE

History is repeating itself in the long lines of the second force camped over to the east of the men of the first contingent. Just is the first week transformed The latter from a rabble of keen but untrained volunteers into the highly-disciplined and well-trained body of men that they now are, so have a few days worked miracles with their comrades down on the "flat" – as the low paddocks are familiarly known. Lieutenant-Colonel Courtney who has command of the infantry battalion is well satisfied with the progress made by his men. Rifles and equipment have been issued, and uniforms will be served out in the course of a few days. *The Argus* 13<sup>th</sup> October 1914 p.8



**HOPTON COLLECTION No. 5122. Westland Wapiti Mk.IIA (A5-12, A5-34, A5-25, A5-37) RAAF - Photographed over Sydney harbour, Australia, November 22, 1935.**

## The New Wapiti Planes

Eight of the 28 Wapiti planes for the Royal Australian Air Force have now reached Australia, and four have already been assembled at Laverton depot. The first eight will be allotted to No. 3 Squadron, which will fly them during their annual camp, beginning at Richmond (N.S.W.) on June 11. The Wapiti is a general purpose plane, fitted with a Bristol Jupiter engine. It is a type which has been adopted only recently by the British Air Ministry. Because of the popularity of the Bristol Jupiter engine, delay has occurred in fulfilling the Australian order, but it is expected that the new planes will arrive now at regular intervals.

The Wapitis are to be used exclusively by the service squadrons. Apart from its two flights of four Wapitis, each squadron will have six more as reserve machines. As a result of Sir John Salmond's report on Australia's aerial defences, the authorities are considering the establishment of an additional squadron for army cooperation. It will be composed "entirely of permanent personnel, and will be located at Canberra. Sir John Salmond proposed that it should be provided in the first three years of his developmental programme. If this squadron is also to be equipped with Wapitis, a further order would have to be placed in Great Britain.

*The Mercury*, 5<sup>th</sup> June 1929, p.3.

## Wargaming Operation Crusader by Mark Moncrieff

One of the things I find interesting about war games is the lessons they can teach, or re-teach the player. A number of years ago I played a board war game called “8<sup>th</sup> Army: Operation Crusader”. A two player game with a difference, instead of one board there were two identical boards. One player controlled the Axis forces and the other (in this case me) controlled the British 8<sup>th</sup> Army.

The tactical situation was the same as before Operation Crusader in North Africa in 1941. Tobruk is under siege and the 8<sup>th</sup> Army is trying to break through to relieve the siege. The German Africa Corp and the Italians are trying to stop the offensive. Historically the offensive was defeated and Tobruk remained under siege.

Each player had a map and the counters representing the units of his army, we also had counters that went on the board to represent the limit of our areas of control. The counters were placed in secret on each players map and the maps remain hidden for the entire game. The player only knowing the state of their own forces and of the land area within their control. Basically it was like a more complex version of Battleship, as I advanced my opponent told me where and when I had encountered his units, as I did for him.

The 8<sup>th</sup> Army which I controlled was very powerful with each Division at full strength. The Axis on the other hand was not as powerful, with one exception. He had 5 Panzer Battalions which were the most powerful units in the game. To destroy a Battalion I would need to find it twice and defeat it both times. That was tough for me and the Panzers worried me a great deal. I knew his army couldn't stop my advance but I was very cautious about my flanks. I didn't want to charge ahead and get units cut off and destroyed, so Divisional integrity was important.

There were basically three ways to Tobruk, through the desert, along the main road or along the coast road. I decided to advance along the main road and to launch secondary attacks along the coast road. I hoped to either destroy the Axis or to force them into the desert. The first turn I attacked and I was stunned by how tough the enemy defences were. I really hadn't expected to meet such resistance right away. So I decided to change my axis of attack and on turn two I attacked into the desert, again I encountered very strong enemy defences. As each turn came I would try to

attack on a random front, probing for his weak spot, but I just couldn't find it. Everywhere seemed as tough as the last place I'd tried. Slowly, too slowly as it turned out I started to make headway and by about half way through the game I was starting to see real progress. I was taking ground and destroying his units, my opponent had not been able to destroy many of my units but I was losing Divisional integrity and momentum.



I had taken so much ground I needed to regroup and my opponent retreated to new defensive positions. Once the advance began again I found exactly the same problem I had encountered at the start of the game, he seemed to be equally tough everywhere. Now my opponent is a very experienced gamer who at that point I had played against in different games for about a decade so I never expected a walkover, but I was getting suspicious, how could he know where I was attacking? I thought I had a pretty good poker face, I even looked behind me at one point to make sure there wasn't a mirror I had missed. To be quite blunt if I had been playing anyone else I would have accused them of cheating.

The game had a limited number of rounds and by the last two turns my opponents army was in tatters, I controlled so much of the board I knew he couldn't have much left. But he managed in the last round to stop my forces from linking up with Tobruk. Winning him the game. As soon as

the game finished my opponent asked me how I knew where his Panzers were! I was shocked because I hadn't known, he informed me that I had totally destroyed 4 Panzer Battalions and had destroyed half of the last Battalion. As we discussed the game we had just played it became clear that I had made a number of errors. I had enough power to push through to Tobruk but I diluted that by attacking on three fronts. I lost sight of my objective to relieve Tobruk and got caught up in destroying the enemy units. I took too long reorganising my divisions and I didn't set them clear objectives. I understood how much trouble my army was in but failed to realise that the enemy was in an even worse position. As it turned out neither of us cheated and neither of us were psychic, it was simply a case of two styles of play coming into contact with each other. He liked forward defence and I liked to attack randomly.

What's interesting is that historically the 8<sup>th</sup> Army failed to relieve Tobruk as well, and it failed for many of the same reasons as I did. It's an interesting point that is often forgotten but history is lived forward with each piece being revealed in its own time. But when we study history we often know the end before the start. The obvious answer is, well, obvious, but commanders don't have that advantage, they cannot see behind the enemy as we can, they don't know which of a range of options is the best, it's trial and error. Here was a game that reminded me that history isn't a foregone conclusion.



## Military Books by David Jenner

**The Red Glutton:** Author - Irvin S. Cobb

This book is one of the little curiosities of the First World War. It was probably written in 1915 (there is no publishing date in the fly-leaf) and was published by Hodder & Stoughton.

Cobb was a journalist, of no professed military background, who with a group of American journalists followed the right wing of the German Army as it marched through Belgium into France in August 1914. They had no official sanction for their travels and were soon detained, but Cobb's observations are acute and astute, and unbiased regarding 'The Rape of Belgium'. No members of German newspapers were permitted to follow the advancing troops and hence Cobb's descriptions are extremely interesting.

The High Command must have decided after his early detention, that there might be good propaganda value in having an American reporter observing the conduct of the war from the German side, particularly in view of the press reports of Britain and France. As a consequence Cobb was given for some weeks a conducted tour of the front, even to observing skirmishes and ascending in an observation balloon.

He makes no attempt to analyse the grand strategy of the Schlieffen Plan, but his admiration of the organization of the army as a whole is evident, with one exception at least. He records some interesting conversations of soldiers and civilians, including prisoners. Cobb notes that the trains coming from Germany with reinforcements and supplies have absolute priority over those trains bringing the suffering wounded back from the battle zone, and describes in some detail graphic scenes at the station where he observed and recorded. This was *the red glutton* - the blood of the soldiers.

Overall an interesting and possibly unique account of a relatively non-military view of WWI.



## Victorian Navy Guns for China by John Rogers, Fleet Engineer (Victorian Navy), Website, research & *Friends of the Cerberus* President.

The author is keen to learn of any further details on the 14 pdr guns and ammunition used in Victoria.

email: [John.Rogers@cerberus.com.au](mailto:John.Rogers@cerberus.com.au)

In 1900 the Victorian Government offered the British Government a Naval Contingent to assist in suppressing the Boxer Rebellion in China. Use of the two long chambered Maxim-Nordenfelt 14-pounder (pdr) Quick Firing Guns from the HMVS *Cerberus* was also offered. Engineer William George Robertson (Victorian Navy) designed and superintended the construction of gun carriages, limbers and ammunition wagons at the Newport Railway Workshops (located between the Williamstown and Werribee railway lines), over a period of seven days.

The guns then accompanied the Victorian Naval Contingent to China. In Hong Kong the 14-pdrs were swapped for 12-pdrs which had the advantage of being lighter and easier to obtain ammunition for. Given that on 22 December 1901 the 14-pdr ammunition on board *Cerberus* was transhipped into the Army launch, *Vulcan*, for transfer to the Military Department, we can assume that the guns did not return from Hong Kong.



Testing of the 14 pounder guns prior to leaving for China

## WHERE the WIRE GOES in WARTIME

WIRE is steel in its most versatile form, and it is not surprising to find it occupying such an important place in the defence of Australia. It is also gratifying to know that practically the whole of Australia's wartime wire requirements are supplied by our own industries. Particularly is this the case with steel wire which comprises the major tonnage of the wire used.

The same iron ore which goes into the steel for tanks, ships and shells provides the raw material for the steel, which in turn, is rolled down and drawn into wire rods. Up to this stage, the product is manufactured by The Broken Hill Proprietary's Newcastle Steel Works. The further processing of a great proportion of the steel rods, however, into the thousand and one wire varieties is carried out at Rylands Bros. (Aust.) Pty. Ltd. wiremills adjoining the steel works at Newcastle. Operations at both works are continuous seven days per week, 24 hours per day. The fighting forces must have their wire and the steel industry will see that they get it!

In peace time, the great bulk of Australian wire was utilised for fencing; Rylands' products, barbed wire, galvanised fence wires, wire netting and "Hinged Joint" fence winning a reputation for uniformly high quality.

To-day, when the defence of the nation is of supreme importance, it has been found necessary to divert this wire to the war effort.

"Ploughshares" are being turned into "swords", and the man on the land must perforce endeavour to carry on, for the time being at least, with curtailed supplies of wire fencing products.

Primary producers can rest assured, however, that should any easing in defence demands permit, supplies of Rylands' "Waratah" fencing products will be made available without delay.

The following brief summary will give some idea how Australian wire is being used in our war effort.

The greatest bulk is utilised in barbed wire defences, in some instances comprised of the specialised

"Barblok", the line wire of which is made of spring wire and is most effective for retarding tank movements. Support for these barricades, and the miles of barbed wire defences on Australia's coast line are provided by Rylands' well-known "Star" steel fence posts specially adapted for the purpose.

Wire supplied to manufacturers for processing into other defence needs emerges as fences for the protection of defence areas, or anti-submarine and torpedo nets.

Many types of wire are made into springs, bolts, nuts, rivets and screws used in armaments such as Bren and Owen guns, and others are used for wire ropes for the Navy, field telephone cable, and for various details in aircraft, military vehicles and ammunition cases.

The demand for wire for welding—a method of fabrication growing daily more popular in the defence industries—has also required considerably increased tonnages of Rylands' welding wire.

Such is the versatility of the wire emerging from the ceaseless drawing operations at Rylands' Wire Mills at Newcastle, N.S.W., that it is difficult to name its every sphere of service. Rylands' wire will be found faithfully carrying out its allotted task wherever Australia's defence functions, may be in the Egyptian desert as a component of the death-dealing machine gun, or as parts of an army truck bouncing over Northern Australian tracks; perhaps as the vital fuse spring in shells in the front line or as camouflage netting, or plaited into a flexible wire rope for aircraft controls.

Yes, that's where our wire goes in wartime!

ISSUED BY RYLANDS BROTHERS (AUSTRALIA) PTY. LTD.

## Branch Project for 2011-12

### The (Re)-Naming of Camp Pell

In late 2010, long-time Branch member George Hellyer put forward an idea for a new project for the Branch to consider. George had been intrigued for years about the two stone sentry boxes in Royal Park, not far from the Robert O'Hara Bourke Memorial. He knew they marked the entrance to Camp Pell and Royal Park itself which had been used as a training area as a camp by Victorian and then Australian forces from 1885 to 1960. History on our doorsteps.

The TV mini-series *The Pacific* reminded us that US Marines were quartered in the MCG in 1942, but how many of us know that Royal Park was the base for many more Yanks, from February 1942 to March 1944? The US Camp was named Camp Pell on 25<sup>th</sup> April 1942, when a US flag, sewn by an Australian Women's Auxiliary, was raised on 25<sup>th</sup> April 1942. It was named after Major Floyd Pell, a Kittyhawk pilot who had been killed in action on 19<sup>th</sup> February 1942 defending Darwin from the first and devastating Japanese air attack. He was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross for his bravery that day.

Your Committee has discussed this at some length and in recognition of the approaching 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of 1942, we have agreed to pursue a Branch project with the following objectives:

- ✓ To conduct a re-enactment event of the flag-raising at Camp Pell, on 23<sup>rd</sup> April 2012.
- ✓ To develop and unveil a descriptive plaque to be located near the sentry boxes which will provide the history of the use of Royal park by military forces in peace and war, commemorate the naming of Camp Pell in 1942 and provide detail of Major Pell himself, who died defending Australia.
- ✓ To develop a commemorative booklet to record the event with background and images

**If *anyone* is interested to help with this project *in any way*, please talk to the project coordinator, VicSec.**