2/2nd PIONEER BATTALION ASSOCIATION

NEWSLETTER **APRIL 2012**

BATTLE HONOURS

Middle East
Syria
Java
New Guinea
Tarakan
Balikpapan

SECRETARY
Jenny Davidson

PRESIDENT
Col Hamley

TREASURER
Ken Fraser

EDITOR Tom Prince

Please address all correspondence to the Secretary

Coming events

Association AGM	Thursday, April 12, Fairfield-Alphington RSL (1.30pm start)
2012 Annual Reunion	Saturday, April 21, Fairfield-Alphington RSL, 7 Railway Place, Fairfield (from 11am — please RSVP by Wednesday, April 11)
ANZAC church service	Sunday, April 22, St Patrick's Cathedral, Melbourne (10:30am start)
ANZAC service Essendon RSL	Sunday, April 22, Queens Park, Moonee Ponds (3pm at the Cenotaph followed by afternoon tea in the Council Chambers opposite the park)
ANZAC Day march	Wednesday, April 25 (assemble on St Kilda Road at Princes Bridge, eastern carriageway, Shrine side of the bridge, at 9.30am; post-march luncheon to be held at 12.30pm at the Waterside Hotel)
Annual pilgrimage	Sunday, June 17, Shrine of Remembrance (assemble at 2:15pm)

Annual general meeting

The Association AGM will be held on Thursday, April 12, at the Fairfield-Alphington RSL, commencing at 1.30pm. All members are welcome.

2012 annual reunion

The reunion will be held on Saturday, April 21, from 11am to 3pm, at the Fairfield-Alphington RSL, 7 Railway Place, Fairfield (directly opposite the Fairfield Railway Station — Melways reference 30K11). Lunch is $20 per head which includes a two-course meal and a raffle ticket with drinks at bar prices.

Please complete and return the enclosed booking form with payment made out to 2/2nd Pioneer Battalion Association by Wednesday, April 11.

Catering numbers will be determined by the number of pre-bookings received. Anyone attending without a pre-booking may have to order and pay from the full menu. Car parking is available at the rear of the RSL, which can be accessed off Gillies Street. This year commemorates the 70th anniversary of when many Pioneers were taken prisoner by the Japanese and the subsequent reforming of the Battalion. Friends and family of the Pioneers are encouraged to attend and join our Pioneers in remembering their experiences and mates, especially those who are no longer with us.

The reply form is enclosed with this newsletter.

ANZAC church service

This year's service will be held on Sunday, April 22, at St Patrick's Cathedral, Melbourne, at 10.30am. All veterans and serving defence force personnel, as well as families and friends, are invited to attend what is guaranteed to be an impressive service.

ANZAC service — Essendon RSL

The service will be held on Sunday, April 22, at 3pm, at the Cenotaph, Queens Park, Moonee Ponds. It will be followed by afternoon tea in the Council Chambers, located opposite the park.

Ballarat POW memorial service

Friends and family of **Col Hamley** and **Harold Ramsey** recently braved Ballarat's chilly wind on February 5 to attend a service commemorating the anniversary of the opening of the POW Memorial Wall. It was followed by a very enjoyable lunch and a few laughs with other former POWs and their families.

ANZAC Day dawn service

Veterans, their children, and members of the public are invited to attend the dawn service, commencing at 6am on ANZAC Day. As with previous years, attendees are asked to be in place on the Shrine forecourt by 5:45am. No lights or noise please and be aware that there is no parking in the Shrine grounds or on Birdwood Avenue.

ANZAC Day March

Note: this year's ANZAC Day March arrangements have changed — again! The march begins on St Kilda Road at Princes Bridge. 7th Division will assemble on the eastern carriageway, Shrine side of the bridge at 9.30am. We will have the banner set up early so please look for it at the assembly area. RACV cars are available for picking up veterans from home to take to the March, then home or to the reunion (not both). Please check with ANZAC House if you would like to arrange this.
We look forward to seeing you wearing your medals and hats. March protocol is to be followed by all marchers:

- All marchers form up and march six abreast.
- Family members should be old enough to make the distance without assistance.
- Attire neat and tidy (torn denim, dirty joggers, sporting attire, etc. are not appropriate).
- No carrying pictures of relatives.
- Relatives' medals are to be worn on the right breast (left breast is for the recipient of the medals).
- Veterans in cars may have one carer with them.
- No prams or pushers are allowed in the march.

Post ANZAC Day March luncheon

This will be held at 12:30pm at the Waterside Hotel, situated on the corner of King and Flinders Street in the Melbourne CBD. All family and friends are thoroughly welcome to attend and catch up for a yarn or three.

70th Anniversary of the Fall of Singapore

February 15 saw a great turnout of Pioneers, their families, and Younger Generation members at the Shrine of Remembrance for the service commemorating this significant day. **Col Hamley** gave the very moving POW Address, which we are pleased to be able to include in this newsletter. Fellow Pioneers to attend with Col included **Tom Gore**, **Clarrie Christie** and **Harold Ramsey**. **Carol Gore** (wife to Tom) was also invited to lay a wreath on behalf of the POW Ladies Auxiliary.

Annual Pilgrimage

The Annual Pilgrimage is held every year at the Shrine of Remembrance on the Sunday closest to the 17th of June. This date commemorates when the Battalion went into action for the first time, at Fort Merdjayoun, in Syria. A feature of the service is the reading of the names of the 2/2nd Pioneers who have passed away since the previous year's pilgrimage. Assemble in the Shrine forecourt on June 17, at 2:15pm. The service commences at 2:30pm. All families are invited to join and share the memories with the Pioneers attending.

Champion boxer remembered

The late **Des Evans** kindly gave the Association photos which included some shots of Pioneer **Mick Eddy** (VX73001). Mick was a champion boxer of his day who was killed in 1943 on the road to Lae. A story on Mick was published in a 1995 edition of the *Warrnambool Standard*. In an interview with the paper, **George Taylor** recounted a poem that had been brought back from the jungle. It is included in this newsletter.



Pioneer Mick Eddy was also a champion boxer in his time.
He was killed in 1943 on the road to Lae.



Exhibition at the Shrine of Remembrance

The second in a series of exhibitions titled *Japan's Entry Into the Second World War (1939-45)* was opened during a ceremony at the Shrine's Eastern Visitor Centre, on February 15, 2012. A large group of members who attended were able to view the exhibition which included a painting and story provided by Pioneer **Tom Gore**. Tom was also featured in the previous exhibition based on experiences in Greece, Crete and Syria. The exhibition is open until Sunday, June 3, 2012.

2/2nd Pioneers website

If you get a chance you're encouraged to visit the Battalion's website at www.2nd2ndpioneerbattalion.com. It contains many topics relating to the Pioneers including history, photos, soldier's profiles, soldier's stories, a notice board, coming events, and much more. Younger Generation member, **Cary Sandell** (grandson of late **Charles Douglas**), has put a lot of effort into setting up and managing the site. All members are encouraged to visit the site.



Give it a try if you have web access.

To receive your newsletter by email

Thank you to all who have requested the newsletter via email rather than post, the response has been great. It makes our job easier and also means you can receive the photos in glorious colour. If you would prefer to have your newsletters emailed then please forward your email address to Jenny at jada1952@bigpond.net.au.

Personal pars

Jennifer Freund sends her regards to all in the association including **Col Hamley**. She is sure he remembers her father.

Rosemary Lowe, cousin of **Bobbie Preston** from Geelong, Vic (widow of **Cliff Preston**) rang to advise that Bobbie passed away on July 26, 2011. Rosemary was aware that Bobbie had kept in touch with some Pioneer families but she is not certain who they are. She asked for this message to be passed on. Cliff's brother **Charlie** was also a Pioneer.

Rob Worthington writes to say that he received "a marvellous reply and photos of my half-brother, **Ted Rowe**" courtesy of **Neil MacPherson**, Vice Chairman of the Burma Thailand Railway Memorial Association (BTRMA).
"They were best mates in Pioneers 2/2nd Btn and served in the Middle East and later went on the Burma railway and to Kyushu in a coal mine together as POWs from Java," says Rob, who adds that he would like to hear from anyone who has further information about Ted.
"It is quite amazing that after a lifetime of almost no contact, I am able to learn some important details of my brother's life and receive photos. Any info you can pass on will be deeply appreciated."
Rob's postal address is: PO Box 60, Warracknabeal Vic, 3393.

Margaret Reynolds has advised that her father **Allan Olson** passed away on April 16, 2011. Alan was very active in organizing events with fellow Pioneers in South Australia. Margaret assisted him for many years and says she will continue attending the ANZAC Day service and keeping in contact with Alan's Pioneer friends.

Sadly, the mothers of three committee members have passed away within six months of each other. **Doris Fraser**, mother of Treasurer **Ken Fraser** and widow to **Stan Fraser** (VX18403), died on July 20, 2011.
Shirley Johnstone, mother of committee member **Wendy Apostolopoulos**, died on September 16, 2011. Shirley was the sister-in-law to **Gordon Johnstone** (VX21631) and **James Johnstone** (VX50919).
Marion Veal, mother of Secretary **Jenny Davidson** and widow of **Ern Veal** (VX38234), died on January 8, 2012.
Jenny thanks Association President **Col Hamley**, the committee, and all members of the Association for their kind messages of sympathy following the passing of Marion. She also thanks all who joined her at the funeral.

Peter Johnson says he would be very interested to hear from anyone who knew his father, **Joseph Geoffery Smith** (VX64638), known as **Geoff Smith**. He arrived in Java on the *Orcades* on February 17, 1942, as a member of 22/27 independent workshop, and not long after was transferred to the 2/2nd Pioneers with other reinforcements.
He came home on the hospital ship *Manunda* along with Australian nurses (including **Vivian Bullwinkel**) on October 11, 1945. Sadly, Geoff committed suicide in 1959, when Peter was eight years old. Peter says he never met his father and has tried to find out as much as he could about him. He says he has some photos and army information but would be delighted to hear from anyone who knew him. Peter adds that he is looking forward to marching with the Battalion this ANZAC Day. Good onya Peter!

Bob and Rose Milliken send their regards and best wishes to all in the Pioneer family, as does **Mrs E. Sauer** (widow to **George Sauer**).

Lionel McIntyre sends his greetings and requested a copy of **Jack Dargaville's** funeral service (no worries Lionel). Lionel says he has been in and out of hospital since September with pneumonia and other health issues.

Milada Matek wrote just before Christmas to say that she too had pneumonia. Sadly, she says, she's had to give up her voluntary jobs, like Meals On Wheels. She says she enjoyed meeting the people and hopes everyone had a lovely Christmas.

Marjorie Jefferey says thank you for the newsletter — she and her family very much appreciate it. Her husband, **John Jeffrey** (of Molesworth), passed away in 2006, and she is now in care in Yea.

Beryl Cowden says it's been eight years since Max died and that time has passed quickly. Now 84, she is happily settled in the Botanical Gardens Retirement Village where she says she is in good hands. She can still drive and has a nice social life, although she had a knee replacement in January. At the time of writing she was expecting to spend three months in the Gold Coast (nice one Beryl!) if everything went well. She sends her regards to everyone.

Betty Hayes says in 1996 and 1998 she and Ron joined 2/2nd Pioneers ex-POWs and their families on ANZAC Day at the River Kwai and later for services at Thanbyuzayat, in Burma. She has attended Association functions in the past but says age is catching up with her, what with her and Ron being in their eighties.
Betty's connection to the Pioneers was through her brother, Pte **James (Jim) Brodribb**. He was with B Coy. and died at the 80 Kilo Camp in Burma on August 12, 1943.
She wishes all Pioneers the best.

Please keep those letters coming! We love receiving your letters and hearing your news. Others also look forward to catching up with those they cannot see or speak to, via the newsletter.

Obituaries

The Association has been advised that the following Pioneers passed away since our last newsletter.

Bennett, R.W. (Wes)	January 2012
Fred, K. (surname changed to Erickson)	August 2011
Grills, R.	December 2011
McCurdy, W.	August 2005
Olson, A.J.	April 2011

Lest we forget

Important note:
Please let Col Hamley or Jenny Davidson know if anyone, either Pioneer or spouse, has passed away.

Donations

Your donations are always gratefully received and we thank everyone for their generosity.

Please keep up the good work!

$200	Marjorie Tilley
$100	Jim McFadden
$50	Lorraine and Garry Lingford, Clarrie Christie, Alan Rae, Kevin Sweet, (brother-in-law to George Murphy), Betty Hayes, (sister to Jim Brodribb, B. Co., died 12/8/43)
$40	Nancy Linton
$30	Bob and Rose Milliken, Beryl Cowden, Lionel McIntyre
$25	Colleen Haines, Marie Foley, Ken Hough
$20	Phil Barnett, Milada Matek, Jennifer Freund (daughter to Don McClelland)
$10	Yvonne Sweeney, Jennifer Pettigrove (daughter to Ron Childs), Mrs E. Sauer (wife to George Sauer)

70th Anniversary Commemoration Service — Annual Fall of Singapore Pilgrimage, Shrine Of Remembrance, February 15, 2012

Col Hamley gave the following POW Address

The 15th of February to most people brings back memories of the fall of Singapore in 1942, and rightfully so. But to me, it marks the day that the *Orcades* berthed in Batavia, on the island of Java, with the news that Singapore had just fallen. However, it is a day when we also pause to remember those who were taken prisoner in Europe and in so many other Pacific islands with the same tragic outcomes.

The *Orcades* had brought my Battalion, the 2/2nd Pioneer Battalion among some 2500 members of the Australian 7th Division out from the Middle East on what we thought was to be our return to Australia. But, under instructions from the British High Command, we were diverted into Java to help stem the flow of the Japanese moving further south beyond Singapore.

It was another case of "too little too late", and we were landed without most of our equipment, ammunition and transport. And so, we were soon engulfed by the Japanese and suffered the same fate as the 8th Division members in Singapore and elsewhere. Fortunately, the remainder of the 7th Division following behind returned safely to Australia.

For me, POW days came as a shock after our successful Syrian campaign, and the indignity of having to kowtow to the Japs was a bitter pill to swallow — as bad as having to swallow their dreadful, almost starvation diet, for the next three and a half years. We always had the feeling that the Allies would eventually hit back at the Japs and within three months or so we would be free again, but no such luck. From hereon, all our travel arrangements were to be courtesy of the Imperial Japanese Army — definitely not to be recommended.

In those three and a half years, we were moved by sea from Java to Singapore. Then, after three months, we moved again by sea, to Moulmein in Burma, both terrible journeys. The latter one was made worse when we were bombed by allied planes, sinking the

Nitie Mei Maru, one of the three ships in our convoy — and nearly doing the same to us when bombs exploded on either sides of our ship, the *Moji Maru*, killing and wounding a number of our men as well as quite a few Japanese.

The sea was full of survivors from the sunken ship, and our ship had been set on fire.
Fortunately, the planes then flew off, and we set about picking up the survivors, many of whom were badly wounded. This was our unwelcome introduction to Burma, but worse was to come in that terrible tragic year of 1943 when the Japanese expended so many thousands of lives due to overwork, starvation diet , and disease in their desperate effort to construct the 415 kilometre rail link between Thailand and Burma. This railway was to be built with the most primitive of tools, picks, shovels, chunkels — a kind of hoe — saws, some explosives, but mostly just manpower — slave labour.

The early months on the railway were in extremely dry and dusty conditions which were bad enough. When the wet set in, in April, the dust turned to slushy mud, which we had to live with for the next six months of almost constant rain. The roads became impassable, food supplies became irregular, and diseases like malaria and dysentery and tropical ulcers became rife; consequential ailments like tinea, pellagra and beriberi and sheer exhaustion started to reduce the numbers available for work, and the Japs could see their work program falling behind. Work hours were increased, sick men were forced out to work and rest days came at less frequent intervals.

Work on the line for us turned from constructing embankments and digging cuttings to quarry work. Quarry work was particularly dangerous because, apart from the risk of being hit by flying rocks during blasting, many men were without boots and any cuts or abrasions from the sharp stones were likely to turn to ulcers. As men became sicker and sicker, death rates began to rise alarmingly, and we even lost our doctor, mainly from overwork. I don't think anyone who has not been in the position that we were in can quite realise what we went through in those years of captivity — not only were we degraded and humiliated but we were deprived of the basic things of life which you don't appreciate until you have to do without them — like clothing and shoes, salt and sugar and soap and toothpaste, and even the most basic of medical supplies. No letters from home, no news of the outside world, but of course, plenty of rumours.

After the railway was completed in December 1943, it was another 18 months of hardship before it all came to an end and, we , the extremely lucky survivors, were at last returned home to our loved ones.

No human being should ever have, or ever again, have to go through such suffering as we went through during those years.

People often remark that the returning men spoke little of their wartime ordeals. But how could you describe the life we lived? With bedbugs and lice and mud, slime and the disgusting insanitary toilet conditions and, add to this, the brutality and inhumanity of the Japanese? The starvation rations, the terrible toll of diseases like cholera, dysentery and malaria, the shockingly painful tropical ulcers, beri beri, pellagra and tinea, and how the Japanese refused to provide even the most minimum amounts of medical supplies.

No, we didn't speak of those things. We spoke more often of Aussie mateship and adaptability and of the unselfish and inspiring efforts of our doctors and medical staff, and of the humorous things that had happened during those terrible years.

I quote from our Battalion history: "As days grew into weeks, weeks to months, months into years, the proud Battalion of Puckapunyal, and of Palestine and Syria, was no longer recognizable by its outward appearance. But it should be known to all whose sons or husbands or sweethearts were Pioneers, that the spirit of the unit remained unquenchable. Those who did not return from Burma and Siam died as bravely as did any soldier in battle. Those who survived deported themselves in a manner that was a source of pride" Those words are truly applicable to all Australian Prisoners of War.



Our very own Col Hamley (right) at the 70th anniversary commemorating the Fall of Singapore with a fellow Ex-POW.

The Fighting Pioneer

Poem dedicated to Pioneer Mick Eddy. Brought back from the jungle by **George Taylor**. Published in a 1995 edition of the *Warrnambool Standard*.

There in Heath's plantation where the slender palm trees wave

Where the coca trees throw shadows they dug Mick Eddy's grave

A requiem was sobbed in the silent day

As with sadness moved the Pioneers to Lae.

They knew they would see him in fight no more

In battle or the roped in square

He had taken the count in jungle war

Had the fighting Pioneer.

‘Twas Rafferty’s Rules in wild combat

No audience to please

As the “wood peckers” spoke their rat-a-tat

And the Brens spat from the trees.

Queensbury was forgotten, gloves gave way to lead

No resin on the canvas, it was jungle mud instead.

No seconds out, no swish of towel, no sounding of the gong

Scrub replaced the stadium and grass grew coarse and long.

No referee to see fair play, men were battle mad

He took the count the front line way, did the Victorian lad.

He was KO’d in the ring of war in the fight for Australia’s cause

Where maddened weapons barked the time and mortars barked applause

Where the kunai spreads its mantle

And the slender palms grow tall

Where the kokomoas fly northward

As the evening shadows fall

And the western sky turns crimson

At the end of a tropical day

The Pioneer champion lies asleep

On the winding road to Lae.

And now for some humour…

The Science graduate asks: “Why does it work?”
The Engineering graduate asks: “How does it work?”
The Accounting graduate asks: “How much will it cost?”
The Law graduate asks: “Who gave approval for it to work?”
The Arts graduate asks: “Would you like fries with that?”

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Police have confirmed that more thieves are stealing petrol from parked cars due to the poor state of the economy. Several victims have reported that they hadn't felt this robbed since they put the petrol INTO their cars.

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A tourist was visiting a cave in the jungle. Being unaccustomed to jungle life, he nervously asked his guide if there were any bats in the cave.

“Don’t worry,” said the guide. “There used to be, but they’re all gone now.”

“That’s good news,” said the relieved tourist. “So what happened to the bats?”

“Oh,” said the guide. “They all got eaten by the snakes”

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A Mexican bandit made a specialty of crossing the Rio Grande from time to time and robbing banks in Texas. Finally, a reward was offered for his capture, and an enterprising Texas ranger decided to track him down.

After a lengthy search, he traced the bandit to his favorite bar, snuck up behind him, pointed his trusty six-shooter at the bandit, and said: “You're under arrest. Tell me where you hid the loot or I'll blow your brains out.”

Unfortunately the bandit didn't speak English, and the Ranger didn't speak Spanish. Thankfully, a bilingual lawyer was in the bar and translated the ranger's message. Terrified, the bandit blurted out in Spanish that the loot was buried under the oak tree at the back of the bar.

“What did he say?” asked the Ranger.

The lawyer answered, “He said, get lost, you stinkin’ turkey. You wouldn't dare shoot me.”

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A local newspaper was running a contest for its readers to see who could come up with the best pun. Mr Johnson thought he’d have a crack at it and decided to send in no less than 10 entries to maximize his chances of winning. Unfortunately, no pun in ten did.

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Did you hear about the man whose dog refused to walk in the forest? His dog was afraid of the trees' bark.

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How much do dead batteries cost?

Nothing — they're free of charge.

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