



THE MIGHTY

12 TH

NEWSLETTER OF THE 12TH BATTALION NATIONAL
SERVICE

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Well it must be that time again.

I hope to have this newsletter out by Anzac Day but one can never tell what “outrageous fortune” has in mind for us poor editors.

It took long enough but there are many smiling faces from guys who have been waiting months for their 12 Battalion Badge and finally received same. I hope you see “lots” of them on you Anzac Day March and perhaps catch up with some other “Mighty 12’s”.

I now have a reasonable supply in stock and many chaps indicated interest in purchasing one (\$13.00 posted) and I can forward these as soon as I get your order and money.

Our list of names in the last newsletter “unearthed” two new names for the directory. We have hit the 300 mark which is great (until you have to fold the non-email newsletters).

Thanks to those who have made contact by phone or mail or email. Those who rang to say thanks for the badge really made the wait, effort and worry truly worthwhile.

To those of our group who are on the sick list, keep your head up. There are many of us who remember what you may be going through and our thoughts (and prayers) are with you and your loved ones.

If you are feeling a bit down and would like a yarn, give me a ring and I can phone you back. Have you had a chance to join the “RED FRIDAY” team? I have not run into too many (one actually) who was wearing the red ribbon each Friday. I got hold of an Australian flag pin and put my ribbon on that. I get a bit pp—oops!! annoyed if I forget to put it on each Friday. For those unsure of the purpose, the idea is to wear something red—ribbons are easy—each Friday to show our support for our troops serving overseas. A few chaps have informed me that they have their Nasho Sub Branches and RSL Sub Branches joining in on the activity. Wouldn’t it be great to see an “ocean of red” each Friday all over Australia.

I mentioned in the last newsletter that I received a letter from Rip Rodd (Lt Col A.D.M, R.L.) Retired.

I haven’t been able to contact him as he does not seem to be on my list— heaven knows why, so if you know him please have him contact me— he has email I believe.

I present his letter as received.(well almost)
Dear Lawrie,

“Snap , Crackle, Pop” just getting my 93 year old brain in memory mode.

“It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom” I think Charlie Dickens said that in his “Tale of Two Cities” The Pollies decided that National Service would be a “good thing”, so elderly officers on the reserve were recycled, other ranks were promoted, not necessarily qualified. The British Army supplied several Corporals who had a lot to learn about the Aussies. Some of the Scottish and Irish personnel were hard to understand— their English being so diluted or something. So eventually we were ready for the first Intake of Nashos and what a splendid lot of young men they were! From all walks of life, prepared to accept whatever the Army could “dish out”.

I think the powers that be thought that once these youngsters had sampled a bit of Military Service, they would rush to join the Army and attend the O.C.S. (one year) or the R.M.C. (four

years) or the Regular Army although Australia at the time was under no immediate threat.

The wishes of the Pollies did not eventuate.

Of course the Army was seriously short-staffed.

A Corporal would usually have a maximum of ten men in his section, he now had 30. A Company Commander would have up to 100 soldiers- he now had 400.

The "Powers that be" also decided that as the Nashos were young growing men and would therefore need more food. The rations were increased by 10%. WOW!

Of course the Pollies had to look after their constituents and answered to parent's letters of appeal so much time was taken up in answering "Ministerials".

Training for National Service was greatly modified. They did not much more than "Square bashing". Bayonet training was out, the throwing of live grenades was out, field exercises were out, unarmed combat was out, Sport was in- except Rugby. The P.T. Instructors organised harmless exercises and Athletics with some success. Parents were invited on Visitors' Day with whom I shared a cup of tea and a little cake. Politicians paid visits and told the boys to ensure that they told their parents that they had met the local Poll.

(I have left this paragraph as written but many of us remember a quite different training regime- In, Out, On Guard, Pull, Throw---wait for it-- Down)

On one of my habitual; inspections I noticed that the ceiling of one of the sleeping huts was sagging a bit so I sent a Corporal into the ceiling to check what repairs were necessary. He climbed down to report that the sag was caused by many bottles of beer concealed there by the young soldiers. Of course I had to confiscate the beer. **No comment**

Peering out of my office window one day I saw a stretcher going by. On the stretcher was a body with a penknife sticki9ng out of his bum.

Another Company Commander was nicknamed "Wings" (because he had once jumped out of a plane- hadn't we all?) He copied the British

Officers by poncing around with a large walking stick and saying things like "Oh, I say, old boy... Wings drove an ancient MG car. After a formal dinner in the mess one night, some enthusiastic young officers dumped the ancient MG on the portico roof of the Officers' Mess. It was some time before "Wings" found his car.

One night after "Lights Out" I was wandering around the Barracks when I noticed the occasional furtive figure sneaking around the boundary. I followed to discover a camper van which included a young "lady" or two. I moved the vehicle on with a threat to call the Military Police. The next day I arranged for the R.M.O. to give a lecture to all the troops. The Doc was a Pole and spoke with a very heavy accent. He addressed the boys, saying in that heavy accent," There is only one cure for V>D> and that is a glass of water- not before, not after but instead of! End of lecture on hygiene.

I thought that National Service was a waste of money in a Military sense but the mixing of youths from all sections of the community was certainly a good thing when Private School Boys met and lived with Public School Boys and found that they all really had a lot in common, irrespective of Religion, education and occupation.

A couple of questions (to me)

1. Did the National Servicemen who served in Vietnam volunteer or were they conscripted.?

Answer: This matter has been discussed at length in recent editions of Revielle.

2. While stationed at Kapooka it was said that no one had ever had a beer at every pub in the Main Street of Wagga Wagga and survived. Could this be true?

Well Rip, I haven't met any who did and if they didn't it's too late anyway. There were far more pubs in the main street then than there are today-

If you would like to respond to Rip's letter, I would be pleased to hear from you. I must admit I had to bite my editorial tongue a few times-

which is most unusual- Ask John Bertles from
Canberra-

**If I have shared this ANZAC Poem with you
before I offer no apology. To me and many
others it has a message to all of us**

The Anzac on the Wall.

I wandered thru a country town 'cos I had time to spare,
And went into an antique shop to see what was in there.
Old Bikes and pumps and
kero lamps, but hidden by it all, A photo of a soldier boy -
an Anzac on the Wall.

"The Anzac have a name?" I asked. The old man answered
"No, The ones who could have told me mate, have passed
on long ago." The old man kept on talking and, according
to his tale, The photo was unwanted junk bought from a
clearance sale.

"I asked around," the old man said, "but no one knows his
face, He's been on that wall twenty years, deserves a better
place. For someone
must have loved him so, it seems a shame somehow." I
nodded in agreement and then said, "I'll take him now."
My nameless digger's photo, well it was a sorry sight, A
cracked glass pane and a broken frame - I had to make it
right. To prise the photo from its frame I took care just in
case, 'Cause only sticky paper held the cardboard back in
place.

I peeled away the faded screed and much to my surprise,
Two letters and a telegram appeared before my eyes.
The first reveals my Anzac's name and regiment of course,
John Mathew Francis Stuart – of Australia's own Light
Horse.

This letter written from the front, my interest now was
keen, This note was dated August seventh 1917. "Dear
Mum, I'm at Khalasa Springs
not far from the Red Sea, They say it's in the Bible - looks
like a Billabong to me.

"My Kathy wrote I'm in her prayers she's still my bride to
be, I just can't wait to see you both you're all the world to
me. And Mum you'll soon meet Bluey, last month they
shipped him out, I told him to call on you when he's up
and about."

"That Bluey is a larrikin and we all thought it funny, He
lobbed a Turkish hand grenade into the CO's dunny.

I told you how he dragged me wounded in from no man's
land, He stopped the bleeding closed the
wound with only his bare hand."

"Then he copped it at the front from some stray shrapnel
blast, It was my turn to drag him in and I thought he
wouldn't last. He woke up in hospital and nearly lost his
mind, Cause out there on the battlefield he'd left one leg
behind."

"He's been in a bad way mum, he knows he'll ride no
more, Like me he loves a horse's back, he was a champ
before.

So please Mum can you take him in, he's been like my
brother, Raised in a Queensland orphanage he's never
known a mother."

But struth, I miss Australia mum and in my mind each day,
I am a mountain cattleman on high plains far away. I'm
mustered white-faced cattle, with no camel's hump in
sight, And I waltz my Matilda by a
campfire every night.

I wonder who rides Billy, I heard the pub burnt down, I'll
always love you and please say hooroo to all in
town".

The second letter I could see was in a lady's hand,
An answer to her soldier son there in a foreign
land. Her copperplate was perfect, the pages neat and
clean, It bore the date November 3rd 1917. "Twas hard
enough to lose your Dad, without
you at the war, I'd hoped you would be home by now -
each day I miss you more"

"Your Kathy calls around a lot since you have been away,
To share with me her hopes and dreams about your
wedding day.

And Bluey has arrived - and what a godsend he has been,
We talked and laughed for days about the things you've
done and seen."

"He really is a comfort and works hard around the farm, I
read the same hope in his eyes that you won't come to
harm. Mc Connell's kids rode Billy but suddenly that
changed, We had a violent lightning storm and it was
really strange."

"Last Wednesday just on midnight, not a single cloud in
sight, It raged for several minutes, it gave us all a fright. It
really spooked your Billy -

and he screamed and bucked and reared, And then he
rushed the sliprail fence, which by a foot he cleared."

"They brought him back next afternoon but something's
changed I fear, It's like the day you brought him home, for
no one can get near. Remember when you caught him with
his black and flowing mane?, Now horse breakers fear the
beast that only you can tame," "That's why we need you
home son" - then the flow of ink went dry, This letter was
unfinished and I couldn't work out why. Until I started
reading the letter number three, A yellow telegram
delivered news of tragedy.

Her son killed in action - oh - what pain that must have
been, The same date as her letter - 3rd November 1917.

This letter which was never
sent, became then one of three,
She sealed behind the photo's face – the face she longed to
see.

And John's home town's old timers -children when he went
to war, Would say no greater cattleman had left the town
before. They knew his widowed mother well - and with
respect did tell, How when

she lost her only boy she lost her mind as well.

She could not face the awful truth, to strangers she would
speak, "My Johnny's at the war you know, he's coming
home next week.

They all remembered Bluey, he stayed on to the end, A younger man with wooden leg became her closest friend. And he would go and find her when she wandered old and weak, And always softly say, "Yes dear - John will be home next week."

Then when she died Bluey moved on, to Queensland some did say, I tried to find out where he went but don't know to this day.

And Kathy never wed - a lonely spinster some found odd, She wouldn't set foot in a church - she'd turned her back on God. John's mother left no will I learned on my detective trail, This explains my photo's journey, that clearance sale. So I continued digging 'cause I wanted to know more, I found John's name with thousands in the records of the war. His last ride proved his courage - a ride you will acclaim,

The Light Horse Charge at Beersheba of everlasting fame. That last day in October back in 1917, At 4pm our brave boys fell - that sad fact I did glean. That's when John's life was sacrificed, the record's crystal clear, But 4pm in Beersheba is midnight over here.....

So as John's gallant spirit rose to cross the great divide, Were lightning bolts back home a signal from the other side? Is that why Billy bolted

and went racing as in pain, Because he'd never feel his master on his back again?

Was it coincidental? Same time - same day - same date? Some proof of numerology, or just a quirk of fate? I think it's more than that, you know, as I've heard wiser men, Acknowledge there are many things that go beyond our ken.

Where craggy peaks guard secrets neath dark skies torn asunder, Where hoof beats are companions to the rolling waves of thunder. Where lightning cracks like 303's and ricochets again, Where howling moaning gusts of wind sound just like dying men.

Some Mountain cattlemen have sworn on lonely alpine track, They've glimpsed a huge black stallion - Light Horseman on his back. Yes sceptics say, it's swirling clouds just forming apparitions,

Oh no, my friend you can't dismiss all this as superstition.

The desert of Beersheba - or windswept Aussie range, John Stuart rides forever there - Now I don't find that strange.

Now some gaze at this photo and they often question me, And I tell them a small white lie, and say he's family.

"You must be proud of him." they say - I tell them, one and all,

That's why he takes the pride of place – my Anzac on the Wall.