

**Royal Australian Armoured
Corps Association Inc.**
Victorian Branch

TRACK

June 2010



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INAUGURAL FINLAYSON SCHOLARSHIP PRESENTED AT DAREBIN RSL



(Robyn Branagan)

The inaugural Arch Finlayson Memorial Scholarship was presented to Nicholas Watts at a function at Darebin RSL on Sunday 06 June 2010. Trustees Tom James (at left) and Rod Westgarth look on as Peter Branagan presents a cheque for \$500:00 to Nicholas; who's Father Trevor is a long serving committeeman and well known former SNCO in the RAAC.



(Robyn Branagan)

Long time supporter of the Corps Mrs Joan Finlayson joined the presentation to Nicholas Watts with State President Daryl Pinner and Arch Finlayson Memorial Scholarship trustees Tom James, Peter Branagan and Rod Westgarth.



At the pre ANZAC Day service at the Darebin RSL on Sunday 18 April, President Daryl Pinner presented the sub branch with an association plaque in recognition of the support they have provided us since we adopted them in 2008.



RESERVE FORCES DAY

Sunday 4th July 2010



A message from the
Governor General and Commander in Chief

Quote:

“If you’re a Serving or Former Reservist, I encourage you to participate,
so that we can all say”

“Thank You”

* **Assemble at**
Government House Drive

No later than 1000hrs



Australian Tri Service Flag

As the **66th anniversary of the most significant amphibious operation ever attempted** is upon us, it is time for some reflections from our own intrepid adventurer retired **Major and lawyer Tom James**.

NORMANDY REVISITED

With Tom James

Overlord was the code name and operation of the allied landing on the Normandy beaches in France on 6 June 1944. On 6 June 2009 the 65th anniversary of the operation to free Europe from Nazi rule by the British, Canadian and US Forces was celebrated along the **coast and towns where the landings took place**.

The genesis of our tour was an advertisement in a district Lions Club International. So I emailed the contact person, Ms Tia O'Shea, the daughter of a Normandy veteran. On replying Tia invited me to a meeting of the Normandy Veterans Association South East Australia Branch. Travel bookings were made with Victorian Branch committeeman Rod Westgarth and his son James also joining the tour. A final lunch for all to meet up, including four students and their teacher from Glen Waverley Secondary College, before we all departed to England. At this luncheon, all the students including James Westgarth, were given tasks to **perform during the ceremonies on the tour**.

Sandra and I flew out two weeks prior to the tour beginning so we could take in some of the attractions of England. Of course there was the mandatory visit to the Tank Museum Bovington, which has benefited greatly from grants provided by the national lottery. A must see for all ex-armoured types. Then two days later to the Woolwich Arsenal, home of the Royal Artillery, a war games symposium was going on which had been advertised in "The Age" early in March. Upon paying the entrance fee I mentioned this to the young woman at the counter and produced the newspaper article. I was asked if I would donate it to the staff at the Arsenal as they had no idea the symposium had been advertised in Australia. Verdict on the Woolwich museum, **it's worthwhile seeing, particularly the film theatre**.

Next day was pack and catch the train to Dover, from where we would meet up with the tour members and depart for France. Departure day minus one was a free day for us and with two others, Jim Johnstone and Bob Gatherum, a veteran who served in the 11 Essex Regiment, Yeomanry, we explored Dover Castle. Although during the war the city of Dover was bombed and shelled often, the Castle was not touched. Apparently Adolf Hitler had given strict orders that the Castle was not to be damaged, as it was from these buildings he intended to rule the United Kingdom. **The Battle of Britain** put paid to a German invasion and a new tenant in the Castle.

Dover Castle has a long history starting from the Roman light house built on the top hill in the early years A.D. There are three defensive rings of fortifications, each representing a different era of occupation, with each ring making it more difficult for an enemy to reach the top keep. During the Second World War, Dover was the headquarters of Admiral Sir Bertram Ramsay, the organizer of the Dunkirk evacuation, together with the garrison designated to defend Dover. Close to the Roman light house is the Castle chapel where a number of Regimental colours, as tradition has it, have been laid up. Finally you have the café and souvenir shop, both of which are recommended for the meals and souvenirs on sale. **The latter are reproductions of wartime posters and similar memorabilia**.

Bob, our fellow venturer, was 89 and did not miss a beat walking around the Castle. Bob had served in the crew of a 5.5 inch medium gun in Normandy and was a font of knowledge on **the artillery battles of the campaign**.

Next day, 4 June, was departure day. We met up with our coach driver, Steve Parker and our guide, Bill McQuade, an ex RAC NCO who had served on Centurions and Chieftains. At the end of our tour both were praised by all on the tour for the way they looked after us. Bill, in particular, had a great knowledge of Normandy and the battles there. From Dover we crossed the English Channel by ferry to Calais and, happy to report on going over and returning, **the Channel was a millpond.**

First stop was the Commonwealth War Graves Commission cemetery at Ranville. Here we had our first look at the sacrifice made to free Europe from the Nazis. The CWGC must be commended for the way all the cemeteries are immaculately looked after. Lunch at Herronville before going to the Merville Battery museum housed in a large casement, part of the Atlantic Wall. This battery position was assigned to the 9th Parachute Battalion for capture early on 6 June 1944. The Paras were successful in putting the battery out of action before the beach landings. Final destination of the day was our hotel, Le Clos Normand at St Aubin sur Mer, overlooking part of Juno Beach. **The Canadian 3rd Division** had been tasked to land on this beach, Juno, and we overlooked where the troops came ashore.

A note on the German fortifications - all were built by Organisation Todt, named after the head builder. Much of the labour used, but not all, was from occupied countries and conditions for the “employees” was harsh. Thousands of tons of concrete and steel was used to make an “impregnable wall” from Denmark to Spain, **however on 6 June the wall was found to have many holes.**

The Normandy landings were along approximately 78 kilometres of beach or sea frontage, with each landing place given a code name. These code names and the units involved were:-

Utah, with the 4th US Division;

Omaha, with the 29th and 1st US Divisions. This was the toughest landing place for any of the forces taking part.

Gold, with the 50th British Division;

Juno, with the 3rd Canadian Division;

Sword, with the 3rd British Division.

Additionally on each flank of the beach landings, airborne forces were dropped to guard those flanks. The US 82nd and 101st Airborne Divisions were dropped on the southern flank and the British 6th Airborne Division dropping on the northern. In the late hours of 5 June both the airborne and sea landing forces **took off towards their designated landing areas.**

Tour day two: 5 June.

The city of Caen is joined to the English Channel by a deep canal over which at Benouville there is a bridge, now named Pegasus Bridge. At 0020 on 6 June, C Company Ox and Bucks Light Infantry landed by glider and captured this essential bridge. Today there is a museum by the side of the canal and the original bridge has been replaced. The bridge captured by the British was removed and is incorporated into the museum. Built on the site of the German casements, the museum contains many trophies of the battle, including the original defenders barracks. At 0830 on the day of our visit, there was a drop by members of the British Parachute Regiment to commemorate the original airborne troops attack. On the north side of the canal is the Café Gondree, the first building in France to be liberated, or so the owner says. If you want to dispute this claim with Madame Gondree, good luck as she is one feisty lady. The local council has taken Madame on over disputes about the café. **Score so far, Madame Grondee three, council nil.**

The afternoon we were at Sword Beach, where the British 3rd Division landed. From the beach we travelled to the Commando Memorial and cemetery at Hermanville. Driving on from that town, we stopped at the statue of, then, General Montgomery. Finally there was a service for the combined Allied Forces held at Caen Memorial Museum. This service had bands playing, troops marching and many spectators looking on. The museum here is larger than most others and features a complete Typhoon fighter bomber. **Happy to say no wartime damage to Caen is now visible.**

Day three: 6 June, the big one.

Morning saw us at the Bayeux Cemetery for a service to which Prince Charles attended representing his mother, Queen Elizabeth II. (Note: apparently the French government had not invited the Queen and the British went feral. This slight upon Her Majesty was rectified when Prince Charles volunteered to attend. **One day the French may get over Waterloo!**)

On the way to Arromanches we stopped at one museum featuring a 360 degree film show. The film was of actual battle footage taken during the battles and you could feel the shock waves from the sound track. For those who had not been on a firing range or battle, it gave them the feeling of the noise **and shock experienced.**

At Arromanches for the big ceremony by the D-Day veterans. At this city are remains of the Mulberry Harbour, being the artificial one built to resupply the allied forces. Mulberry was an engineering feat, which the Germans neither knew about nor comprehended the allies would use for resupplying the troops in the campaign.

Although this was supposed to be summer in France, down came the rain; however the celebration ceremony went on regardless. The weather caused some disappointment as everyone had to find what limited shelter was available. The highlight though was a fly over by the Battle of Britain flight, consisting of a Lancaster Bomber and two late model Spitfire fighters. The crowd went wild, clapping and cheering as the trio of **flying veterans flew three times over the city.**

It was wonderful to see the old veterans and the respect given to them by everyone attending on the day. The French have not forgotten either the young men who died or the **old who are still with us today.**

Day four: 7 June.

On this day we travelled to Le Hamel, a small town on Gold Beach, there we looked over the area where the only Victoria Cross awarded on D-Day was won by CSM Stanley Hollis. Nothing of the damage remains now and all is peaceful; only a small German concrete pill box on the coast track **reminds you this was once a battlefield.**

On to Omaha Beach, where the Americans had much trouble taking a foothold. The US commander, General Omar Bradley, even contemplated pulling the force, but hold on they did. Here at Colleville the US Forces cemetery is located and you see row upon row of either crosses or the Star of David, showing the cost paid to free Europe. There is a small museum at the cemetery and on one wall is a comment by an American sergeant. "You can build vehicles on a production line, you can build airplanes (sic) on a production line, but you cannot build courage on one". Perhaps this sums up the feeling of that day. President Barack Obama had been there the day before for his nation's celebrations of the historic day. As our tour could not be at both Arromanches and Coleville, **we missed seeing the President.**

Ending the day at St-Mere-Eglise, the town captured by the US Airborne on D-Day, because of the strategic crossroads going through there. The US Airborne had a parachute drop early in the day as a representation of the first landing. And the whole town was full of people celebrating. On the church steeple was a parachuted dummy, representing Private John Steel, who had been caught up there on the night of the attack. In the town square everyone was having a good time and being entertained by singers on stage, as well as two young ladies dancing the can-can. **Well it was France!**

The finale to the day was a passing visit to the German cemetery at La Cambe. Here there are few individual graves, but a mound where **many bodies have been interred.**

Day five: 8 June

End of the tour with Sandra and I going up to a small memorial at the end of the street, where our hotel was located, leaving two sprigs of rosemary for remembrance to the **French people who had died in both wars.**

Back to Calais and to Dover for one more night and farewell to our new friends. **Goodbye and a promise to meet again back home.**

Highlights

On the night of 5 June a firework celebration was fired off along the waterfront of St Aubin. Some of the ladies had to be re-assured it was not explosives, but only fireworks. Starting time for the firing to commence kept on being altered; nothing changes. The next morning we gathered at the low tide mark, placing small wooden crosses in the sand as our **mark of respect to those who died on D-Day and afterwards.**

We held a short ceremony on Juno Beach to allow one of the ladies to place a wreath in the sea in remembrance of her father, a Normandy veteran, who had passed away in 2008. I watched as the wreath was gradually taken out by the tide, **as if going out to meet the veteran's spirit.**

At one other cemetery a veteran laid a cross on four graves close together. Under the headstones were the bodies of the crew from a self-propelled gun. Our veteran had buried the crew a few days after the landing and, once the cemetery had been laid out, their bodies had been re-interred there.

A personal story of the tragedy of war.

On passing the memorial to General Charles De Gaulle, our guide, Bill, said De Gaulle was a legend in his own mind. For on the memorial De Gaulle had said he had landed to free the French people. Omitted were the efforts made by the US, British and Canadian forces. Many historians have written on the actual effort by the allies, **but De Gaulle seemed to have forgotten the allies.**

In conclusion General Eisenhower said in his note to the allied forces: "you are about to embark on the Great Crusade". On 6 June 1944 the Allies did embark on the crusade until 8 May 1945, when Germany surrendered; the war in Europe was over. We were glad to have seen the places, the memorials, the museums and the cemeteries where those who paid the ultimate price are interred.

An all too short tour, nevertheless a memorable one.

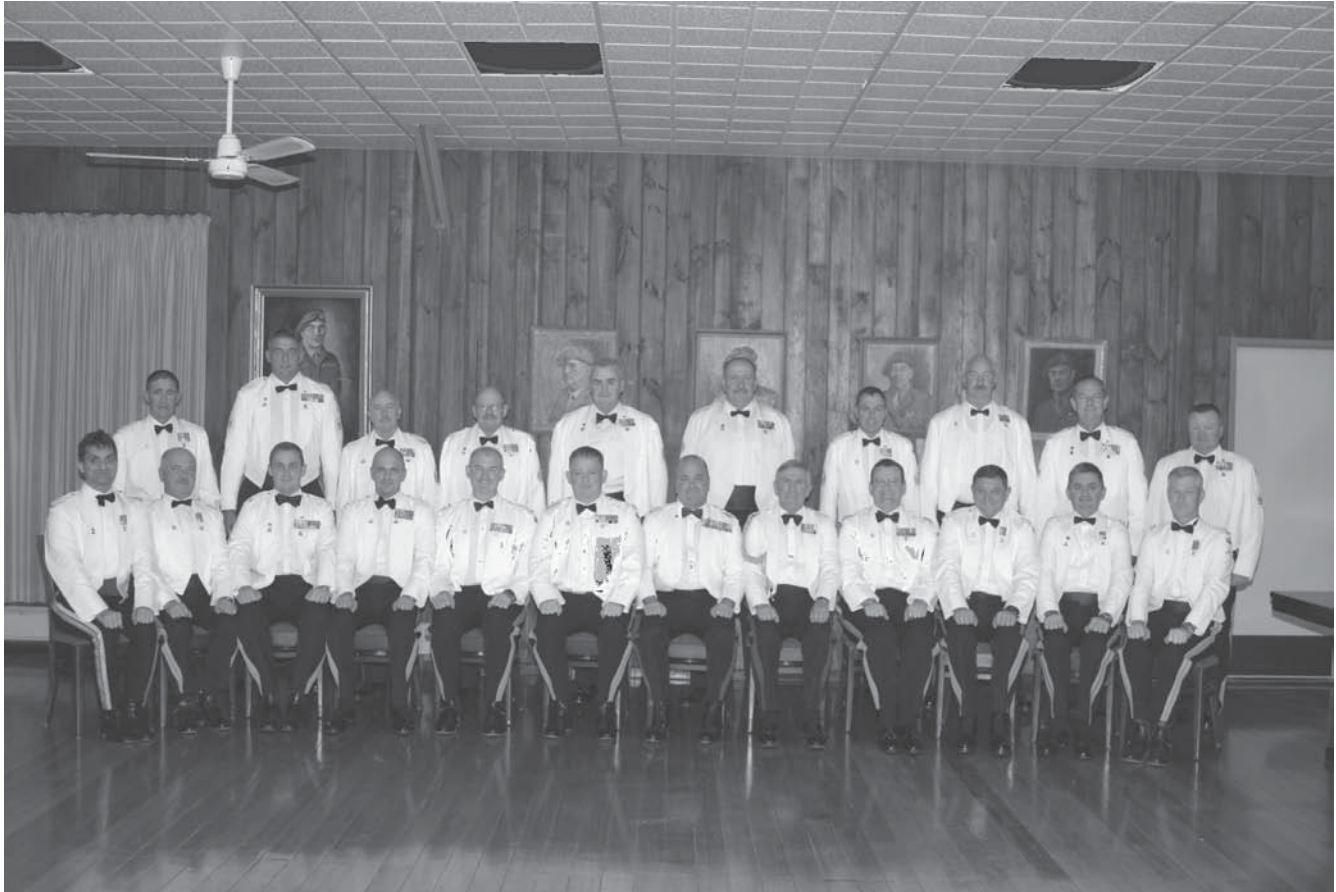
Tom James RFD.

RESERVE FORCES DAY 4 July 2010

State President Daryl Pinner exhorts all currently serving and ex serving members of the **CMF or Army Reserve** to join him in supporting the Reserve Forces Day Council in their efforts to **promote service in the Army Reserve to the people of Australia.**

The parade will form up in Government House Drive at 1000 hrs for a proposed step off at 1030 hrs. The formation will be reviewed by the **Chief of Army-Lieutenant General Ken Gillespie, AO, DSC, CSM.** **Get along with your black beret and give the Reserve some much needed support.**

RAAC LEADERSHIP GROUP CORPS DINNER 13 MARCH 2010



(WO2 Joe Linford)

(Rear Row Left to Right) WO1 C. Geoghegan, WO2 G. Armstrong, WO1 P. Thompson, WO1 J. Ludeman, WO1 P. McNeill, WO1 B. Dunn, WO1 J. Carroll, WO2 E. Richards, WO2 D. Simpson, WO2 A. Dannatt.

(Front Row Left to Right) Lt Col C. Monsour, Lt Col R. Cox, Maj M. Scott, Lt Col C. Mills, Lt Col S. Johnstone, Lt Col T. Archer, Brig R. Noble, Maj Gen R. Powell, Lt Col D. Graham, Lt Col E. Luisetto, Maj K. O'Grady, Maj H. McKendrick.

The Victorian Branch Gratefully Acknowledges the Following Donors

D.G. Bretel John Blackwell Michael Annett Tim Fanning David Webb Ron Hogan

SOCIAL CALENDAR.....

Mark your diary now for the **Children's Christmas Party** at the **Diamond Valley Miniature Railway**, Lower Eltham Park (Melways reference map 21 H10). We have re-booked **Meadmore Junction** (currently undergoing extensive refurbishment) for **Sunday 19 December 2010**.

As usual **Santa is timetabled to arrive by train at Meadmore Junction Station at 1300 hrs**. We have booked our first dedicated half hour special to arrive at the picnic area **at 1100 hrs** with the afternoon service at **1400 hrs**. Both these trains traverse the extensive layout for 30 minutes and have proven very popular with all ranks in the past. If you miss the first boarding don't despair, the special will return on the quarter hour for a changeover of passengers. **Rod and Sharon Westgarth** put a lot of effort into organising this fun day, so come out to Eltham and **give the kids (from eight to eighty) a great day out**.

Remember we provide soft drinks and bagged sweets, you provide a suitably wrapped and labelled present for Santa to give to your children.

The now well entrenched **sausage sizzle** gives you the option of not having to pack a picnic lunch. **Rod and Sharon** will be only too happy to flog you a couple of bangers or a track pad or two!

Remember it is a condition of travel on the Diamond Valley Miniature Railway **that all those intending to ride the rails, must wear suitable enclosed footwear.**

**So come along and join the fun
on Sunday 19 December 2010 from 1000 hrs.**



Welcome to the Crew

Tony Archer

CAMBRAI DAY COMMEMORATION DINNER

**Saturday 20 November 2010
1900 for 1930 hrs**

**Hopkins Barracks Officers/Sergeants Mess
Puckapunyal**

**Guest of Honour
Brigadier Mark Holmes, MVO
Commander
Land Warfare Development Centre
Puckapunyal**

Cost: \$50:00 per head for members
\$60:00 per head for non members/guests

This function is our premier event for the year and as usual we are providing a quality guest speaker for your enjoyment

All enquiries to:
Daryl Pinner (H) 9359 4520
Peter Branagan (H) 5793 8171

On Sunday morning enjoy a sumptuous cooked breakfast in the Officers Mess outdoor pergola area

Dress: Lounge Suit or Reefer Jacket
Miniatures

Tickets posted out early September

RSVP by 08 November 2010

Accommodation is limited

The Arch Finlayson Memorial Scholarship

Application Form

Applicants for the Arch Finlayson Memorial Scholarship must complete this form and mail to the address given below. The Scholarship is open to first year apprentices and is worth \$500.00.

Name:
(First name/s) (Surname)

Address:
.....
..... Post code

Telephone:

What is your apprenticeship?

Employer:

Employer's address:
..... Post code

Contact telephone number:

Registered training institute or TAFE

Name of financial RAACA member

Address:
..... Post code

Telephone number

You will need to enclose copies of or bring to your interview the following:-

1. A supportive resume in brief.
2. A copy of signed training agreement.
3. A copy of your enrolment at a registered training institute or TAFE.
4. A supporting letter from your employer.

After your application has been received the three Trustees of the fund will require you to attend for an interview at a time, **date and place to be advised.**

Return this form, together with all supporting documents to:-

The Trustees

Arch Finlayson Memorial Scholarship Fund

RAACA - Victorian Branch

P0 Box 547

COBURG VIC 3058