



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

TRACK

September 2009



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A CELEBRATION OF SERVICE



(Major D. Falvey)

A very sprightly Major General C.M.I. 'Sandy' Pearson, AO, DSO, OBE, MC (Retd) pictured at the dinner held in honour of his service at the RAAC Officers Mess Puckapunyal on Friday 28 August 2009.

Welcome to the Crew

Dan Exeter Gilbert Arthur Kirsopp

Night of the Generals



(Major D. Falvey)

Joining in the Celebration of Major General Pearson's Service were Major General Craig Orme - Head People Capability, Major General Dave Chalmers - Head of Corps and Major General Roger Powell - Representative Honorary Colonel



Pearson family members (standing left to right) Mr Dan Weeitch, Miss Kate Weeitch, Mr Tom Weeitch and Mrs Amanda Hope. Seated Mrs Sandra Oxley, Maj Gen Pearson and Mrs Elizabeth Weeitch.

Detailed below is the second part of his 2008 pilgrimage to the battlefields of Gallipoli, the Middle East and the Western Front by former State Branch President, historian and author Dr David Holloway. It is a particularly poignant tale of service and sacrifice by ordinary Australians which is unfortunately lost on the majority of ‘ordinary’ Australians today. **Please enjoy this most evocative narration.**

A Pilgrimage

By Dr David Holloway

With our son living in Europe, we next took the opportunity to spend a couple of days in Barcelona with him and his fiancée, another expedition involving numerous flights with Iberia Airlines back and forth between Tel Aviv, Madrid, Barcelona and finally Brussels in Belgium – more of the joys of frequent flying points. It was a terrific weekend in the Spanish city and a welcome break from what becomes quite rigorous historical, military delving.

A different adventure awaited in Belgium. Hiring the car was easy, navigating it out of a foreign city on the wrong side of the road wasn’t, but we managed, even after a delayed start because Iberia had managed to leave our luggage in Madrid although we had arrived in Brussels. A short drive found us in Bruges, a beautiful little town, largely rebuilt after the last war and a popular destination for Australian boys after the First War. I have to say it’s “t’Brugs Beertje Bierboetiek”, an authentic Belgian beer cafe has to be the best stocked in the world, with about 250 different Belgian beers available; some with quite a kick, up to 11%! The proprietor is happy to talk, explain and offer you a wide variety, **especially if you drop in during the afternoon.**

Next morning we set off for Ypres, and as you approach that town, ingrained, or it should be, into the Australian psyche, you begin to come across cemeteries, at first the odd one and then, increasingly, they are all around and contain so many graves. You stop, almost bewildered, and after a little searching start to find Australians and again that sense of something overwhelming takes hold of you. This too is a special place. We drive on, into the market square and find our little hotel with the odd name of “Old Tom” right in the heart of the square. Nothing pretentious and no lift, but we manage and find our room on the first floor opens onto the market square, all carefully rebuilt exactly as it was before each of the wars. We settle in and begin to explore. It’s evening and I have to find the Menin Gate – it turns out it’s just around the corner. At 8 o’clock the buglers begin, three of them tonight. A good crowd, absolutely silent. A small party of Canadian veterans hold centre stage tonight. It is difficult to remain dry-eyed. After a little time to reflect and to find the Light Horse names high up on the wall, hunger takes over and we dine at **one of the numerous cafes around the square.**

First stop next morning is the office of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission. They couldn’t be more helpful, providing me with a print-out of every Australian Light Horseman they have listed in Belgium and France and with a Michelin guide overlaid with the location of the 956 – yes, 956, war cemeteries in France and Flanders. Finding all these boys is going to be some job, but we will. It is now the first week of May, Tuesday 6th. Today we found nine 4th Light Horse boys, crossing at one point into France, not that you can these days easily tell that you have. At each of the cemeteries we found the register and located the appropriate graves where we placed a poppy. The names are curiously haunting:- Mendinghaem, Haringe, Lijssenthoek, Arneke, Bailleul and Westhof Farm. How strange they must have seemed to young blokes from half a world away. **Now how carefully those graves and cemeteries are looked after by local people.**

Wednesday May 7th began with a walk along the Menin Road to the Menin Road South Cemetery where Trooper John Gook of Yea lies. The inscription, “Mother’s only son” is heart rending in the early morning sun. All we can do is place a poppy beside him. Back to Ypres and into our car, we head off toward Potijze Chateau Grounds Cemetery. The site is now adjacent to and reached between two carefully tended backyards. There is no chateau anymore, but Corporal Les Langtry won’t know that. On we travel; Hooge Crater, Rue David near Fleurbaix and the infamous Battle of Fromelles. **At Estaires Communal Cemetery** we learn that **Trooper Charles Guppy** was “A hero in the deadly strife, for King and country laid down his life”. Our travels end for the day after locating **Duisans British War Cemetery.**

Having found these two days quite demanding and draining, I decided to take one of the several battlefields tours next day, one that encompassed all three battles of Ypres, the earlier two not involving Australians. I visited Essex Farm; the casualty clearing station where Lieutenant Colonel John McCrae wrote "In Flanders Fields"; the village of Boezinge, never captured by the Germans and supposedly the origin of the word 'boozing' because it had a number of estaminets, or drinking places; the German cemetery at Langemark, used by Hitler for propaganda in the Second War; and an array of familiar places in name at least – Zonnebeke, Broodseinde, Tyne Cot, Passchendaele and Polygon Wood. A rather subdued little group returned along the Menin Road, through the gate and back into Ypres. The afternoon found us exploring the restored magnificence of the Cloth Hall, several churches and the city **walls of this beautiful little town.**

That evening we returned for the evening ceremony at Menin Gate. Sporting my slouch hat and plumes, regimental tie and so on, I was questioned by a number of people, locals and tourists, about the Light Horse. The most moving conversation was with a fine young British marine about to return to Iraq. He hoped he'd do his duty and be alright. **I certainly hope he is.**

On Friday we drove southward, toward the Somme and our new home for the next few days, a farmhouse in Flers, run by a British couple, expert in the First War. Along the way we found a few more boys from the 4th at odd little cemeteries as we travelled via Armentieres, Bethune, St Pol, Frevent and Amiens. We also visited the impressive Australian Memorial at Villers-Bretonneux where a number of Light Horsemen's names are found on the walls, **although none are buried there.**

Next day I went with our host on a Somme tour that included Bullecourt, Peronne, Maricourt and various nearby sites, including the Bullecourt Digger, the Slouch Hat Memorial, Mouquet Farm and Mont St Quentin. After lunch in Bapaume where we were again joined by our son Justin, we returned to Villers-Bretonneux, this time the memorial and the town itself that houses the school built by Australian funding and where the museum is located. The Light Horse slouch hat in the museum must be the one **donated by old Bill Scott,** stalwart of the 4th Light Horse Association that used to hold its monthly dinners in the **Sergeants' Mess at 4th/19th's Park Street Depot years ago.**

Our last day on the Somme was spent disposing of our remaining poppies in the AIF Burial Ground before continuing on to Thiepval, an absolute must on any battlefield tour, the Ulster Memorial, Beaumont – Hamel where trenches are still visible, and the Newfoundland Memorial. That night we enjoyed a meal with our hosts at Curlu a tiny village not far from Maricourt. In the dull light of evening the Somme looked so peaceful, tranquil. **What a contrast to 90 years ago!**

Our journey wasn't over; we still had Berlin to see – Checkpoint Charlie and all that, a few days in Spreewald, eastern Germany, just across from the Polish border, and then almost a week in northern Italy, amongst the refreshingly cool Alps in Spring. More aeroplanes and several trains later we arrived in Frankfurt for our homeward flight. At least this time there were no detours and we arrived back at **Tullamarine in the very early hours of 28th May.**

What had been a once in a lifetime trip was at an end. We had spent a great deal of time, as one of my former Commanding Officers said, 'in the company of brave men'. We had paid them homage, we had honoured them and we had thanked them. We had been deeply moved, we had been horrified and we had begun to understand better. We were very proud to be Australian, we were very humble and we hoped that many, many more Australians would be able to undertake a similar journey, to be grateful and to learn a little more about their countrymen's achievements and about themselves.

With this in mind, **John Hopkins** and I are beginning to plan a similar pilgrimage in 2011. Yes it will be expensive, but it will be an unforgettable experience. If you are interested, do two things – **let us know and start saving.** My phone number is (03) 9645 3136 or you can email hoppy@bigpond.net.au or me, dkholloway@bigpond.com We are very much in the preliminary stages but our intention is for a group of about 20, not too many more. We will have guides for Egypt, Turkey, Israel and the Western Front, probably different guides in each. We will stay in reasonable but not 5 star accommodation. We will focus on battlefields, commemorative places and cemeteries, most with a Light Horse influence, and particularly Victorian Light Horse. We will undertake some additional activities – eg. Grand Bazaar in Istanbul, Old City in Jerusalem, Belgian beer cafes. The whole tour is expected to take about a month, and will probably be in May or September. We will try to arrange independent travel for those who want it, between Australia and our destinations rather than insisting on all being together, so that those who want to use frequent flyer points or upgrade to Business can do so. **There will be updates as we approach 2011.**

VALE

Colonel Francis Charles Pearson, OAM, ED, EM (Retd)

23 August 1913 – 04 July 2009



A large crowd was in attendance at the W.D. Rose and Joseph Allison Funeral Home in Cheltenham on 13 July to celebrate the long and bountiful life of **Colonel Frank Pearson**. Included in the crowd were members of Frank's extended family, long time business associates and employees and a large contingent from the military community.

During the course of his life he had established himself as a very successful businessman particularly in engineering, specialising in air conditioning. He was also recognised as an expert breeder in the cattle industry. Members of Frank's family recounted many stories of growing up in the Pearson family which **confirmed with those present that he had a keen sense of humour**.

Major General Greg Garde, AO the principal speaker detailed his long military career commencing with his enlistment in the 6th Field Company, Australian Engineers on 29 January 1930 until retirement in August 1964. In those pre war years, **Frank served with 2nd Field Company**, Australian Engineers and the 2nd Anti Aircraft Searchlight Company where he was commissioned on 14 October 1939. Following service with the 53rd and 54th Anti Aircraft Company, Frank was seconded to the AIF on 14 May 1941 and marched into the **newly formed 2/6th Australian Armoured Regiment**.

His immediate task was involved in raising the sabre squadrons and eventually command of HQ Squadron. Promoted to Temporary Major in June 1942, he served with the unit on very intensive active service in New Guinea/Buna/Cape Endaiadere until April 1943. The unit returned to Australia to Southport Queensland to refit and retrain but never deployed again and **Major Pearson was demobilised on 23 October 1945**.

With the raising of the Citizen Military Forces in 1948, **Major Frank Pearson** was appointed second in command of 8th/13th Victorian Mounted Rifles. On 01 January 1953 Frank was appointed Commanding Officer 4th/19th Prince of Wales's Light Horse Regiment, a position he held until December 1956. He then continued to serve in senior staff appointments until retirement in 1964. Colonel Pearson remained extremely active over the ensuing years, supporting the 2/6th Armoured Regiment Association and his beloved 4th/19th.

He was also a champion of the old 4th Light Horse Regiment Association and supported their monthly dinners for over 30 years and later when they had all gone, the widow's Ladies Nights. His other passion was the 4th/19th Regimental Museum and through many trials, tribulations and unsatisfactory temporary locations, he saw it firmly established at Watsonia as the Regimental History Room.

In early 1991 the 4th/19th Prince of Wales's Light Horse Regiment Association was formed and naturally Frank was appointed as Patron, **a position he held till his passing.**

The publication of the unit history Hooves, Wheels and Tracks by David Holloway would never have eventuated without his physical and moral support. He was belatedly recognised with a Medal of the Order of Australia in the **2005 Queens Birthday Honours List.**

The eulogies were delivered by Major General Greg Garde, AO and Colonel Brian Glendinnen, OAM, ED RL. John Baker read the lesson and recited the Ode to the Fallen.

Principal mourners from 4th/19th Prince of Wales's Light Horse Regiment were Commanding Officer **Lieutenant Colonel Edward Luisetto** and Second in Command **Major Tony Geyer.** Musician **John Mansfield** provided his usual outstanding support with the playing of The Last Post and Rouse.

Other former Commanding Officers in attendance were Brigadier Angus McNeilage, Lieutenant Colonel John Williams, Lieutenant Colonel Chris Grigsby and Lieutenant Colonel Graeme Smith.

Bringing up the rear were Daryl Pinner, Tom James, John Paterson, Dr. David Holloway, Rod Westgarth,

Roy Arnott, Tom Murphy, Stan Rydell, John Hopkins, Graham Wright, Graeme Perkins, Ron Lavars, Stuart McDiarmid, Clarrie Rule, Harry Austen and Peter Martin.

Colonel Frank Pearson served his country for more than 70 years; although not tall in stature, his effort, commitment and dedication was immense.

Daryl Pinner, OAM



The dark suits got a work out again in August with the passing of **Mrs. Dot Ballentine** widow of the late **WO1 Gus Ballentine, WO1 Bob Harris** and former Director of Armour Brigadier **Terry Walker.** More to follow in December Track.

STOP PRESS

PLEASE NOTE CHANGE OF POST BOX NUMBER

NEW ADDRESS IS P.O. BOX 547 COBURG 3058

ARCH FINLAYSON MEMORIAL SCHOLARSHIP

The Victorian Branch has been given an endowment to set up a scholarship fund to be known as the **Arch Finlayson Scholarship Fund**. The fund has been made available by Arch's family in memoriam of his service to the Corps and to the Association. **The Committee thanks the Finlayson family for this generous endowment.**

The objective of the fund is to **grant scholarships to first year apprentices**, with a maximum of two awards being made each year. **The first scholarships will be awarded and paid out in 2010. The amount paid to the successful applicant will be \$500.00**, however the Committee may, upon the recommendation of the Trustees, raise this amount.

The scholarships are open to the child of a member who has been a financial member of the Association for at least five years. Also a child of a deceased member, who was financial at the time of their death, may apply to the Trustees for a scholarship.

An applicant must be studying in a recognized vocational trade and produce evidence of this to the Trustees.

Payment of the scholarship will be made to the successful applicant upon the completion of the 90 day probationary period of apprenticeship. The Trustees will require evidence of such successful completion one same has been received from the employer of the applicant.

When making an application to the Trustees, the applicant must provide the following:

- a. A supportive resume.
- b. A copy of signed training agreement.
- c. Copy of enrolment at a registered training institution.
- d. A supportive letter from the employer.

Failure to provide any of the above documents may either delay the applicant's interview with the Trustees or have the application rejected.

Currently the Trustees from the Committee are **Peter Branagan OAM, Tom James RFD and Rod Westgarth**. All applicants will be required to have an interview with the three Trustees.

Application forms will be in the next issue of "Track". If your child is eligible, then they may make an application for the **2010 study year on the form provided.**



CAMBRAI DAY COMMEMORATION DINNER

**Saturday 21 November 2009
1900 for 1930 hrs**

Hopkins Barracks Officers/Sergeants Mess
Puckapunyal

**Guest of Honour
Major General Craig Orme, AM, CSC
Head People Capability
People Strategies & Policy Division**

Cost: \$50:00 per head for members
\$55:00 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 09 November 2009

Accommodation is limited

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 H 10). We have booked **Meadmore Junction** (currently undergoing extensive refurbishment) for **Sunday 20 December 2009**.

As usual **Santa is timetabled to arrive by train at Meadmore Junction Station at 1300 hrs**. We have booked our first dedicated special to arrive at the picnic area **at 1100 hrs** with the afternoon service **at 1400 hrs**. Both these trains travel 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 to the Junction on the quarter hour for a change over 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**. We also provide **complimentary rail tickets** so you can take the family for a ride on their regularly scheduled trains at any time.

The now traditional **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 sausage 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 20 December 2009 from 1000 hrs.**

AROUND THE ASSOCIATION...

RAACA Proposed Restructure – Progress Report

At the 2008 RAACA Federal Congress a proposal was put to the Congress by the RAAC Corps RSM and the current President of the 1st Armoured Regiment Association. The proposal laid out a proposed path to restructuring the association on a national basis. It encompassed both RAACA state branches and unit associations. The Victorian Branch undertook to look at the proposal and its effects on the state branch and be in a position to report to the **RAACA Federal Congress on 10 October 2009**.

At the time of writing the following actions have been taken:

- a. RAACA Vic Branch formed a sub committee including Peter Still, Peter Branagan, Vin Brennan and Rod Westgarth.
- b. A timetable for reporting has been agreed to by the state branch committee.
- c. A request for comment from unit associations and individual members was put out in the December 2008 issue of *Track*.
- d. The 1st Armoured Regiment, 4/19 PWLH and 8/13 VMR Associations have been contacted to provide input to the discussions.
- e. An internal draft of a Transition Implementation Plan (TIP) has been produced.

Next steps to be taken prior to the 2009 Federal Congress include:

- a. Continue to receive comments/input from relevant organisations/individuals.
- b. Finish the draft of the TIP.
- c. Present the draft TIP to the Vic Branch committee and members and local unit associations.
- d. Present the draft TIP to the RAACA Federal Executive on 10 October 2009.

Ralph Eldridge, gentleman, soldier, sportsman, father and family man and, above all a great Australian. So wrote **Major General C.M.I. ‘Sandy’ Pearson, AO, DSO, OBE, MC** in his foreword to David Holloway’s biographical tribute to the late Brigadier Ralph Trevelyan Eldridge, OBE.

This tribute, simply entitled *Eldridge* is a fitting testimonial to the life and service of a quintessential Australian. Your association has a **limited quantity of books available** and are offering them at the **bargain price of \$30:00 including postage and packaging.**

Rush your order to **Godfrey Camenzuli at P.O. Box 547 Coburg, Vic, 3058** or email him at glc.14@bigpond.com get in early and don’t miss out on this bargain. A limited number of signed copies by the author **Dr. David Holloway** are still available.



AC1 Sentinel Trials Puckapunyal 1942

