



Issue 1-2006

## **"THE MICE OF MORESBY" MEMBERS BULLETIN**

President Peter Wright has recently been in hospital and instead of his usual report at this time has asked that his report to the Annual General Meeting to be used in its place.

As we approach the end of another years, let us look back on what has transpired in that time. Unfortunately, but also expectedly, we face declining membership, we have said "farewell" to many old mates, far too many to list here today. Your commit meets regularly at the Hornsby RSL to conduct the business of the Association. In February we had the dedication of our Battalion Plaque which was quite an occasion for those who attended. The plaque is now embedded in the grounds of the Canberra War Memorial along with plaques of other serving units.

From the sale of "Remember" Booklets a presentation of \$2,500 was made to the Sydney Hospital, and much appreciated.

To remind members on a approaching event, Harry Matthew organises a luncheon at Hamilton RSL Club prior to Anzac Day and our December re-union. In past days these have been well attended; but recently numbers have been well down. Thanks, Harry for your support.

**The Anzac Day march** was well attended considering the age of our members and distances travelled by many who marched. An enjoyable afternoon was spent at the Shark Hotel and memories recalled.

Several events are held at Victoria Barracks in Sydney, unfortunately these days are not well publicised and excellent displays of bands and marching are missed by many. What a disappointment the 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary March on August 13<sup>th</sup> turned out to be, no publicity, no crowds, no cheering, very few participants. By means of phone calls to our members in the metropolitan area we managed to have fourteen on parade. Thanks to Charlie Jennings's family we had flag and banner bearers. The Kokoda Walkway had a splendid program next day, with an enormous cake. Two of our members have recently represented the country overseas, Hugh Eadie going off to Hawaii for the Pacific War Victory celebrations, Harry Matthew off to Borneo to mark the anniversary of the infamous Sandakan March.

At this **AGM** I would like to thank all members of the committee for their interest and may we all be granted many, many more years to spend with our families and friends.

**AUSTRALIAN ARMY BAND** which has supported us over a number of years by sending a bugler to our December wreath laying ceremony has released a CD of the Big Band of the Australian Army Band Sydney. This CD is available at Birdland Records call (02) 9267 6771 or from PR AAB-S Victoria Barracks PADDINGTON NSW 2021, cheque/money order payable to Commonwealth Receiver of Public Monies cost \$20.00. Funds raised are dedicated for the care of the Homeless. The CD is entitled "CAMOUFLAGE."

### **A REVIEW OF PAUL HAM'S BOOK "KOKODA"**

Those of you fortunate enough to read this book will be interested to read a few comments from Len BROWN. Len has a keen mind and first-hand knowledge of those times. He writes: -

"I have just read Paul Ham's book entitled "Kokoda" and the amount of research Paul has done to write this book is an amazing credit to him. However, I would like to clarify some points, where I suspect the inaccuracies in his information may be due to inaccuracies in the official records and no fault of his own. These points relate to the actions that took place at Sanananda Rd

- Firstly, the whole of 30<sup>th</sup> Brigade was not at Sanananda Rd,
- Secondly, the number of casualties was vastly understated in the book.
- Finally, men did not retreat from the Road due to not knowing how to use hand grenades, these were a number of much serious reasons for this retreat.

I discuss each of these points in more details below.

- Paul refers to the *"high rate of casualties on the Sanananda Rd, and on the 7<sup>th</sup> December Brigadier Porter's militia brigade received 138 killed and wounded"*. The fact is that on 7<sup>th</sup> December the 49<sup>th</sup> and 55/53 were on the Sanananda Road, the 39<sup>th</sup> was at Gona. The 49<sup>th</sup> and 55/53 were well below full strength and on the 7<sup>th</sup> December the combined units received 359 casualties, of which 22 were officers and 337 other ranks, not the 138 listed in Paul's book.
- The order we were attacking under would have helped lead to this high casualty rate, it was, "No man to go to ground, no man to take cover, fix bayonets, advance and clear out the enemy."
- With the enemy strength and position unknown this order was ridiculous. Machine guns just mowed us down. A similar attack took place on 19<sup>th</sup> December by the 55/53<sup>rd</sup> and left 108 killed and wounded and this could have been the attack referred to when the author states, "The 53 took part of the Road but could not hold it because they didn't know how to use their grenades." I assume that this would be from official files.
- The truth is that they were pushed off the road by the strength of the Japanese counterattack, aided by being under mortar fire from our own mortars. Our C.O. was reluctant to use the mortars as he was unsure of our positions.

When the battalion was withdrawn from Sanananda, General Vasey addressed what was left and he praised and thanked them for their efforts".

### **RAAF PLANE ON TERRIGAL BEACH (article not transcribed)**

#### **MEMORABILIA CABINET**

With grateful thanks to Peter **WRIGHT** and his expertise with all things wooded we now have a glass fronted and topped supplementary cabinet at the Glebe Library. We are now able to display items that may be of interest to the public and plan to rotate items on display on a regular basis. While on the subject of memorabilia I received a phone call from Ian **REES**, son of Major Wally **REES** 21/2 55 Battalion at Greta in the early days of 1942, A WWI veteran who did not accompany the unit to New

Guinea. Ian has in his possession some mugs with the Battalion Crest and names of officers from the pre war days of the 53<sup>rd</sup> Battalion and had offered them to the association for safe keeping.

We are also in possession of the Communion chalice used by the 53<sup>rd</sup> Battalion in France during those dreadful days and thanks to Padre Hugh Scott for his help in this matter. The chalice has been in the possession of St John's Glebe for many years, but as we no longer attend an annual service there it was felt that the chalice could be displayed for a time with our memorabilia and later found a permanent home.

(A photo taken at the Glebe library of the cabinet was omitted as it is not a good copy a more recent photo is included instead.) The photo below was taken about 2013 at the present location of the Memorabilia cabinet. The cabinet was relocated about 2010 as the City of Sydney requested it be removed and that it was apparent that collectors had been accessing the cabinet and stealing valuable items. Peter Dowling – Transcriber.)



### **GREENSLOPES HOSPITAL**

Strong bond with the veteran community can be traced to its origins as the 112<sup>th</sup> Australian Military Hospital. Shortly after Australia entered World War II in 1938 planning began for the construction of Army base hospitals in each state to care for the war wounded. In Queensland the Army selected Greenslopes as the ideal sit. The first 132 patients were admitted in early 1942; having been transferred from “Yungaba”, the old military hospital at Kangaroo Point. In October 1942 the hospital was renamed the 112 Brisbane Military Hospital. By November 1945 Greenslopes was the largest Army base hospital in Queensland, with 1120 patients and 900 staff, and it had earned a reputation for excellence in medical and nursing care. Its busiest time from 1945 to 1946 when PsOW returned home in urgent need of medical attention. During the war the Hospital was staffed by members of the Australian Army Nursing Services (AANC), the Australian Army Medical Womens Service (AAMWS) and the men and women of the Australian Army Medical Corps (AANC). On 1<sup>st</sup> April 1947 the Commonwealth Repatriation Commission took control of the hospital to provide

ongoing care for veterans and war widows. It was sold in 1995 to a private health care provider Ramsay Health Care.... (Peter 2019- there was significant resistance in the community to the sale of this hospital). (With acknowledgement to hospital Anzac Day Ceremony & Remembrance committee 2005.)

### **ONE OF WORLD WAR II'S BEST KEPT SECRETS<sup>i</sup>**

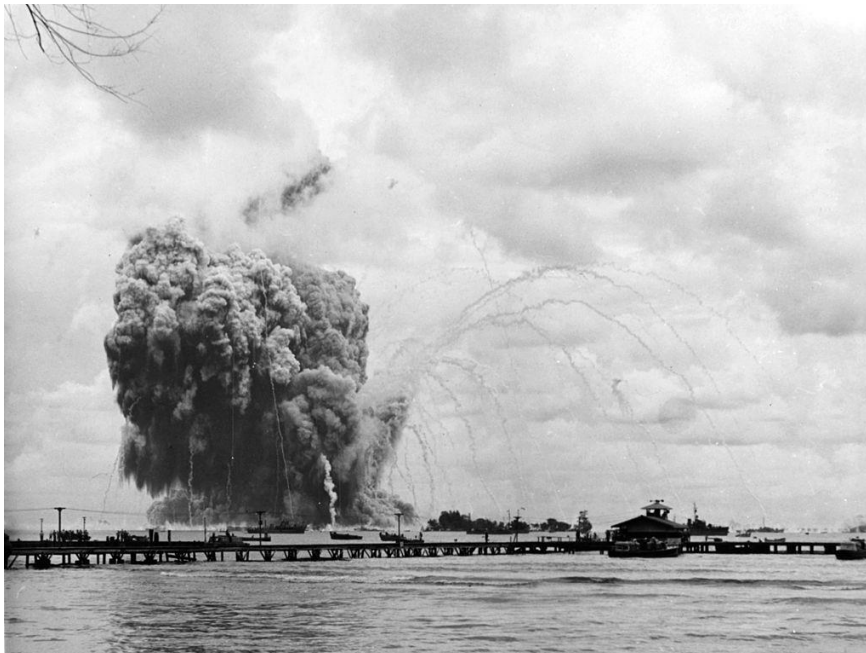
The morning on 10 September (Correction November) 1944 dawned fine and hot. Anchored in Seeadler Harbour, one of the Admiralty Group of Islands north of New Guinea was a vast array of warships being part of the frontier strike forces of the American Seventh Fleet including warships of the Royal Australian Navy.

Little did the sailors going about their daily chores, realise that one of WWII's greatest marine disasters was about to happen.

Suddenly at approx. 0800, a terrific explosion rocked this huge naval base sending out a blast that would affect many ships. Running to the port side of by RAN warship HMAS "Hawkesbury" I witnessed an amazing site. Rising thousands of feet into the sky were vast columns of smoke and soon pieces of a ship were dropping like shrapnel into the harbour and on all vessels including my own ship anchored nearby.

I was a signalman on duty aboard by ship and hearing the initial explosion I dashed to my locker on my mess deck and with help of the delayed shock, I took a scoop photo with my little Kodak box camera.

Among the many American and Australian warships then anchored in this huge natural harbour was an American Ammunition ship of 14,000 tonne USN "Mount Hood" named after an American volcanic peak in Oregon USA. It was this ship that had exploded and then vanished in a matter of seconds.



This a photo from Wikipedia.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/USS\\_Mount\\_Hood\\_\(AE-11\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/USS_Mount_Hood_(AE-11))

*Mount Hood* explodes: the smoke trails are left by fragments ejected by the explosion.

Later figures proved 372 of her crew were presumed dead and many others on ships nearby were killed or injured. The final death toll was in excess of 600.

**KOKODA TRAIL MEMORIAL** was dedicated on 20<sup>th</sup> November 2005 unveiled by General Peter J Cosgrove AC MC at the corner of Kokoda Avenue and Clissold Streets Wahroonga. The units involved in the campaign are recorded on the several plaques by state of origin and the memorial is a fitting tribute. Hugh Eadie represented the association at the dedication ceremony.

#### **DIAMOND WEDDING**

Congratulations to Bob and Mavis Lawrence who celebrated their Diamond wedding anniversary on 6 March 2006. May you both have many more years together.

Anyone else who has reached this milestone or is about to, let me know so we can rejoice with you.

**ADRIAN NALL** our Sigs officer sends me sad news that his wife Meryl died on 7<sup>th</sup> March. Adrian and Meryl first met when he was a patient in Townsville AGH in 1943. Meryl had trained as a VAD nurse and had joined the A.A.M.W.S. (Australian Army Medical Women's Service) and served from April 1943 to July 1946. She was a member of the 2/14 A.G.H. team that went to Singapore to attend and repatriate the P's.O.W. from Changi. Meryl and Adrian married on 9<sup>th</sup> April 1946 in St Paul's Presbyterian Church and honeymooned on Daydream Island. I am sure that I extend to Adrian and family the sincere condolences of all our members and especially on behalf of his Signals Platoon. Anyone who wishes to contact Adrian, his address is PO Box 13, WURTULLA QLD 4574 or phone 07 5493 5652.

**WAR DEPARTMENT  
HISTORICAL DIVISION  
WASHINGTON 25, D.C.**

Papuan Campaign: the Buna-Sanananda Operation is the second of a series called AMERICAN FORCES IN ACTION. The series was prepared at the suggestion of General of the Army George C Marshall, Chief of Staff. His forward, as used in the original edition, appears on the previous page. The series was originally designed for military personnel only and primarily for wounded hospitals to tell them the military story of the campaigns and battles in which they served. With cessation of hostilities, Papuan Campaign is released as a public document. This study was based on the best military records available. Although in its published form it contains no documentation, the original manuscript, fully documented, is on file in the War Department. Aerial photographs are used by the Allied Air Forces, S.W.P.A.; all others are by the U.S. Army Corps. Readers are urged to send directly to the Historical Division, War Department, Washington 25, D.C., comments, criticisms, and additional information which may be of value in the preparation of a complete and definitive history of the Buna-Sanananda operation.

| Regimental<br>Combat<br>Teams        | Strength<br>Entering<br>Combat<br>zone                 | Casualties          |                 |                         |                   |                     |
|--------------------------------------|--|---------------------|-----------------|-------------------------|-------------------|---------------------|
|                                      |  | Killed in<br>Action | Other<br>deaths | Wounded<br>In<br>action | Sick in<br>action | Total<br>Casualties |
| 32 <sup>nd</sup> Division            | 26 September 1942 – 28 February 1943                   |                     |                 |                         |                   |                     |
| <b>126<sup>th</sup><br/>Infantry</b> | 3791   | 266                 | 39              | 816                     | 2285              | 3406                |
| <b>127<sup>th</sup><br/>Infantry</b> | 2734   | 182                 | 32              | 561                     | 2813              | 3588                |
| <b>128<sup>th</sup><br/>Infantry</b> | 3300   | 138                 | 29              | 557                     | 2238              | 2962                |
| 41 <sup>st</sup> Division            | 2-23 January 1943                                      |                     |                 |                         |                   |                     |
| <b>163<sup>rd</sup><br/>Infantry</b> | 3520<br>(plus<br>Estimated<br>Strength<br>300<br>3,820 | 85                  | 16              | 238                     | 584               | 923                 |
| <b>Total</b>                         | <b>13,645</b>  | <b>671</b>          | <b>116</b>      | <b>2172</b>             | <b>7920</b>       | <b>10,879</b>       |

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ii At 08:30, 10 November 1944, a party consisting of communications officer, Lt. Lester H. Wallace, and 13 men left the ship and headed for shore. At 08:55, while walking on the beach, they saw a flash from the harbor, followed by two quick explosions. Scrambling into their boat, they headed back to the ship, only to turn around again shortly thereafter as "There was nothing but debris all around..."

*Mount Hood*, anchored in about 35 feet (11 m) of water,<sup>[1]</sup> had exploded with an estimated 3,800 tons of ordnance material on board. The initial explosion caused flame and smoke to shoot up from amidships to more than masthead height. Within seconds, the bulk of her cargo detonated with a more intense explosion. Mushrooming smoke rose to 7,000 feet (2,100 m), obscuring the ship and the surrounding area for a radius of approximately 500 yards (500 m). *Mount Hood's* former position was revealed by a trench in the ocean floor 1,000 feet (300 m) long, 200 feet (60 m) wide, and 30 to 40 feet (9 to 12 m) deep.<sup>[1]</sup> The largest remaining piece of the hull was found in the trench and measured no bigger than 16 by 10 feet (5 by 3 m). No other remains of *Mount Hood* were found except fragments of metal which had struck other ships in the harbor and a few tattered pages of a signal notebook found floating in the water several hundred yards away. No human remains were recovered of the 350 men aboard *Mount Hood* or small boats loading alongside at the time of the explosion. The only other survivors from the *Mount Hood* crew were a junior officer and five enlisted men who had left the ship a short time before the explosion. Two of the crew were being transferred to the base brig for trial by court martial; and the remainder of the party were picking up mail at the base post office. Charges against the prisoners were dropped following the explosion.

The concussion and metal fragments hurled from the ship also caused casualties and damage to ships and small craft within 2,000 yards (1,800 m). The repair ship *Mindanao* which was broadside-on to the blast, was the most seriously damaged. All personnel topside on *Mindanao* were killed outright, and dozens of men were killed or wounded below decks as numerous heavy fragments from *Mount Hood* penetrated the side plating. Eighty-two of *Mindanao's* crew died. The damage to other vessels required more than 100,000 man-hours to repair, while 22 small boats and landing craft were sunk, destroyed, or damaged beyond repair; 371 sailors were injured from all ships in the harbor.

A board convened to examine evidence relating to the disaster was unable to ascertain the exact cause. After only a little over four months' service, *Mount Hood* was struck from the Naval Register on 11 December 1944.