



## 12 Field Regiment (Vietnam) Association (A Branch of the NSW RAA Association)

### 12 Field Regiment (Vietnam) Association

#### In this Issue:

- **Presidents Letter**  
Page 1
- **Fr. John Tinkler**  
Page 2
- **The Battle of Fromelles** Page 3
- **ACB Applications**  
Page 4
- **Non-Financial Members** Page 4
- **New Members**  
Page 4

#### **Don't forget your MEMBERSHIP**

**Multiples of \$10.00  
Annually or better still  
\$100.00 Perpetual  
(10 years)**

**Direct Credit:- NAB  
BSB 082 225  
A/C. No. 83 654 6425**  
Please ensure you  
include your name.

### President's Letter

Good morning Gentlemen and Ladies,

Little has happened in the last three months in regard to Association activities. However, since the last newsletter, both 104 and 102 Batteries have had their reunions on the Anzac day weekend. The 102 Battery reunion was held in Sydney and the 104 reunion was held in Darwin. From all reports the 104 Battery reunion was an outstanding success, with all members having a great time. The 102 show in Sydney was equally as good with both Battery functions achieving high turnout rates from most members and wives. The 102 reunion on Anzac Day displayed the largest turnout ever for the march down the streets of Sydney since the "Welcome Home" parade in 1987.

Your committee held a meeting in Newcastle on the 21<sup>st</sup> of July. The meeting was very fruitful with many items important to the future of our Association discussed and decided upon. It was decided by majority vote that the Association name *will not* be changed to facilitate the current serving members of 8/12 Regiment to join our Association. The proposed name change was only mooted so that current serving or past members of 8/12 Regiment could identify the Association as representative of both them and past members of 12 Field Regiment.

Our rules already state that our Association welcomes current and past members of 8/12 and all other branches of Artillery to join our Asso-

ciation. To change our name to facilitate what could be a minority wishing to join us would be folly. Many of our current members feel that the (Vietnam) part of our Association is indicative of what our association is about. We were formed in the first place to be here for the benefit of veterans of Vietnam and if the Association passes away after the passing of our last Vietnam veteran, then so be it.

We also discussed briefly our lead up planning for our next **Regimental** reunion to be held in Adelaide on the Anzac day period in 2012. The original plan was to have the reunion sometime in 2011 however the fact remains that both 102 Battery and 104 Battery had reunions in 2010 and to hold a reunion next year would be to close to the ones held this year. We considered that a reunion every second year is sufficient. We are looking at holding the reunion in the Glenelg area, a coastal holiday strip of the South Australian coast.

#### **A Battery is Reborn!!!!!!!**

On the 20<sup>th</sup> of May, I received an email from a Captain Duncan Anderson, who is the current serving Adjutant of 8/12 Medium Regiment in Darwin. Duncan informed me that he was selected as the first Battery Commander of the 102<sup>nd</sup> CORAL Battery since its demise in 1988. The battery will be formed in Adelaide commencing from January 2011. It will consist of a BC's party, 3FO parties, (4xM198 howitzers) and a combat service support pla-

### Winter 2010

toon. It is being raised and constituted as part of the 7 RAR mechanised battle group. The group will be stationed at Edinburgh RAAF base in Adelaide. Being a mechanised battle group, the Battery will eventually be equipped with the first self propelled medium guns for the Australian army in the near future. Cpt Anderson expressed his pride to be selected to command and is keen to establish a good rapport with our Association.

#### **Yearly membership dues.**

Yes, it is time to pay our membership fees again. **Could those members who pay their membership on a yearly basis, please send their cheque for \$10.00 to our honourable Treasurer, John Beer P.O. Box 82 Glenfield 2167.** Please pay now to avoid us having to remind you at a later date.

As mentioned earlier, we are planning a Regimental reunion in Adelaide on 24 - 26<sup>th</sup> of April 2012. It will almost be fully funded by your association. Hopefully, all members will pay will be for their transport to and from Adelaide and their accommodation. The planning for the events will be carried out by a couple of our members who live in Adelaide. We are holding around \$24,000.00 in funds and figure it is about time that we extend a little generosity to our membership by giving them a free function. More on the reunion in coming quarterly newsletters.

Cossie.

## TRUE BLUE

**The Soldiers' Priest**

*Amid the destruction and despair at the frontline, the endearing and empathetic*

*Father John 'Tink' Tinkler was there offering support – and a smile.*

THROUGHOUT A YEAR'S service in the Vietnam War, Father John 'Tink' Tinkler never carried a gun. "I chose not to so the soldiers would know I was there for them, not the war," he says. It caused fellow diggers angst during his 1968–69 tour of duty. Tink, now aged 72, recalls an occasion when he was ready to go to a fallen soldier's unit but was blocked by an officer because he was weaponless.

"He said: 'What would you do if the enemy surrounded you?' I looked him in the eye: 'Sir, I'd wait 'til they got up really close then I'd lasso them with my rosary beads and tie the bastards up. Sir.'"

With a ready laugh, sparkling blue eyes and a knack for winning people over, Tink was ordained in Condobolin, in central western NSW, in 1962, aged 24. He didn't volunteer for war but joined the Army when the National Service Scheme was reintroduced in 1964 and the churches were asked to provide more chaplains.

After two years, he was sent to Vietnam with an extra battalion needed to bolster Australian forces. Talk to any of the many soldiers Tink encountered and stories fly like bullets. Former 1RAR platoon commander John Salter recalls "Tink would drive us all nuts wanting to patrol with the rifle platoons. The more dangerous the mission, the more he wanted to go."

John remembers once when he was keeping Tink close while on patrol by making him a signaller (carrying the radio) and he asked him to send headquarters a situation report. "Tink took the handset and said loudly and clearly: 'Hello God. Hello God. This is Tink, over'," says John.

"So endeth stealth and secrecy – the whole bloody patrol fell about laughing."

Tink is embarrassed when told many soldiers held him in high esteem: "I was only a bloody chaplain for heaven's sake! It was an honour to be a part of them."

Former 102 Battery member Bob Costello says Tink "put up with some shit" from non-believers. "He went to great lengths one night in the boozier to christen [a digger called] Floydie as a

good Catholic," he says.

Tink remembers it well: Floydie burst into a group he was addressing, eyeballed him and said: "I've always hated Catholics, always will," then disappeared.

"He did that each time I talked to a different group. After a while I was waiting... So when he burst in, I asked: 'Floydie, what are you drinking?' Floydie replied: 'Aussie VB.' I said: 'Give it here.'

He handed it to me and I tipped it over his head and said: 'I baptise you a Catholic. What do you think now you're one of us, you bastard?'"

To this day, Floydie and Tink remain good mates.

Filmmaker Leonie Jones talked to more than 100 veterans for her documentary "*They'll come looking for you: The Battle of Fire Support Base Coral*" and says it was Tink's recollections that affected her most. "Tink had to write the letters home to the wives and mums," she says of the four-week campaign that claimed the lives of 25 Australian soldiers and hundreds of North Vietnamese. "It was just so sad, when you look at these 22-year-old, skinny boys going home in body bags." "They always wanted to know more detail," Tink says of the families. "A lot of them wrote to me when I was over there as if they were still writing to their son or husband." Many remain in touch.

Tink also stays connected to his returned comrades and understands Vietnam's lingering legacy. Like so many Australian soldiers that returned, he too experienced Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), suffering a breakdown in 1998. "I had to ask to be moved away from a parish because I couldn't stand facing people and being in public," he says.

"I went to a school as a school chaplain [and] it was just like being in the Army. Each class was like a different unit. You just went around and mixed with them on their level. I got back on my feet that way."

Decades after the Vietnam War, and despite battling his own demons, the Catholic priest at Moama, NSW, continues to support his diggers, attending

Regular get-togethers for veterans in Echuca, Victoria, and, inevitably, presiding over many of their burial services.

Former 1RAR platoon commander, Garry Prendergast, says while other padres were "priests first and people second, Tink was a person first and a priest second... a leader. If you put rank on him and told him to climb over a wall and attack somebody, everyone would follow him, not that he ever wanted to do that, not that he ever did. But he had that charisma about him and still does."

**MATT DUNN**

(Reprinted by kind permission of Australian Geographic)



Photo courtesy James Braund

**RÉSUMÉ**

**Age:** 72 Location Moama, NSW

**1962:** Ordained at Condobolin, NSW, for Catholic Diocese of Wilcannia–Forbes

**1965:** Joined Australian Army as a chaplain

**1968–69:** Australian Army's 1RAR Chaplain, Vietnam

**1972–74:** ANZUK Forces HQ, Singapore

**1979:** Awarded MBE

**1992:** Left Army, returned Wilcannia–Forbes Diocese as a parish priest; awarded CSC (Conspicuous Service Cross)

**2003–Present:** Parish priest Moama, NSW

## Powerful Remembrance & Honour of our soldiers past (Reprinted by kind permission of Australian Geographic)



**NINETY-FOUR YEARS** to the day after they were killed and buried anonymously in one of the first world war's bloodiest battles, 250 Australian and British soldiers have been finally been laid to rest with the recognition they deserve.

The Battle of Fromelles, in northern France, represents the worst 24 hours in Australian military history, with 5533 diggers killed, wounded or captured. An estimated 1780 Australian soldiers died and 503 British troops lost their lives. Many of their bodies were never recovered.

On Monday the final 250 soldiers whose bodies were discovered in a mass grave in 2007, were buried at a new military cemetery at Fromelles. Watched on by the Prince of Wales, Australian Governor-General Quentin Bryce, Minister for Veterans' Affairs Alan Griffin, Chief of Army Lieutenant General Kenneth Gillespie and hundreds of families, a coffin carrying an unknown allied soldier was farewelled with full military honours.

### End of a long silence

"We are here to observe the end of a long silence," the Governor-General said to mark the occasion. "A near-century of questioning and not knowing, of loving hearts unrequited. Generations of absence, lives extinguished without explanation, missing without proper account. That is, until today."

Ninety-six of the soldiers - all Australian - have been identified through DNA testing and have been given tombstones inscribed with their names. A further 109 soldiers have been confirmed as having served in the Australian army and three were British soldiers. The remaining 42 have been classified as unknown and their headstones read: "A soldier of the Great War. Known unto God."

Prince Charles, accompanied by his wife the Duchess of Cornwall, paid tribute to the bravery of the 250 men who lost their lives on 19 July 1916. "In laying this last hero to rest we honour them all," Prince Charles said. "I am profoundly humbled by the outstanding bravery of these men who fought so valiantly in the indescribable mud and carnage, many thousands of miles from their families and from their homes."

### Family connections

Of the 96 identified Australian soldiers, 80 had family members who travelled to France for the special occasion. Brisbane man David Parker made the journey with his son, Robert, to pay his respects to his uncle, Second Lieutenant John Parker. "(We) never knew what happened to him," David says. "It means a huge amount to the family to have final closure and know that Uncle Jack has had a proper Christian burial. It's the final chapter in a long, long story."

Perth woman Heath Stook, 27, came to visit the grave of her second cousin, Raymond Bishop, who was considered "missing in action, presumed dead" until DNA matched to her grandmother confirmed his body had been found.

"He went over with two cousins and he actually fought in the battle with one of his cousins by his side," she says.

"His cousin was writing letters back home to our family, which we've got copies of, and they weren't exactly sure what happened to him. They never heard...they always had a little shimmer of hope that one day he might turn up back on the doorstep because his body was never found. [The discovery of his remains] is definitely a bit of closure."

## Alert!!!!!!!

### Change of Address???

It appears some members are changing email addresses and not notifying us of the change as we are getting many bounces on the newsletter when we send it out on email.

If you are getting your newsletter via snail mail and you used to get it by email, **we must not have your current email address.**

*If you have an email* and you are still receiving your newsletter by mail could you please notify your Secretary, Ian Ryan by email at the following email address:-

[ianryan@hotmail.com](mailto:ianryan@hotmail.com)

Postage has gone up and it is wasteful to send them by post if you have email facilities.

I would like to have a relative or friend's e-mail to forward urgent alerts.

Ian Ryan  
Secretary

## New Members

The following applications have been approved by the Committee.

Welcome to:-

Ian Dimond	102
Brad Frost	HQ/104
Rod George	104
Peter Olsen	HQ
Glen Wiseman	HQ/104
Peter Wood	

Membership badges will be forwarded shortly.

## Army Combat Badge – Approved Applications.

The following names have been approved by HOR, School of Artillery, Puckapunyal for the ACB.

2792504	John Karl Beer	A Bty
26396	Ray Leslie Café (Dec'd.)	
2786530	David Carlson	102 Bty
2786543	Rex Eric Child	102 Bty
218816	Daniel Patrick Donovan	104 Bty
3411740	William John Free	102 Bty
1202750	Bradley Frost	104/HQ Bty
2412432	Stephen John Grainger	RHQ
2786826	David Walter Thomas	102 Bty

The Certificates and badges will be forwarded as soon as possible. Please be patient.

There would appear many Gunners are entitled to apply for the ACB, so please do .

Equally, if you have applied for an ACB through this Association and have not received your ACB, ***please contact*** the Secretary, Ian Ryan, on

[ianryan@hotmail.com](mailto:ianryan@hotmail.com)

Postal address:-

2 Pine Crescent, RINGWOOD, VIC., 3134.

Or

Phone:- (03) 9018 8991 / 0411 650077



## IMPORTANT: Non-Financial Members – Are You an MIA?

Our **OVERDUE** Membership renewals are down to **18**. We would like to ensure the following members are aware that their subs are due. If you know these guys, please contact them to encourage them to remain as part of our group.

**Banking details are on the front page.**

John Burns	102	QLD
Valmai Burns	Ass	QLD
Peter Croke	HQ	QLD
Mark Dougall	HQ	VIC
Jim "Snowy" Easton	102	QLD
Ian Esler	161	NZ
John Feint	102	NSW
Antonio Ferraro	104	WA
Colin Gordon	131	SA
Charles Hayden	104	QLD
Jennifer Hogan	Ass	NSW
Phillip Johnston	104	QLD
James Laing	HQ	QLD
Dianne Leaf	Ass	NSW
Brian McDowell	104	NSW
Brian Neville	LAD	NSW
Clarrie Ormsby	161	NSW
Tim Perrin	HQ	QLD

These members have been absent with their memberships for more than 12 months and in some cases two years or more.

If **you**, as a current Member, have contact with any of these Members, would you please make sure they are OK and encourage them to renew their membership.

If they **do not** wish to continue their connection with the Association, would you please ask them to send me a short resignation so that I can update our files. After 3 months, we will no longer forward e-mails or mail in the future.

**N.B.** It is extremely important to keep in touch with our brothers to ensure that they are in good health and in good spirits. If they are in need of assistance, it is up to us to point them in the right direction for help.

Please remember your membership is probably due **now!** Please check.  
Ian Ryan  
2 Pine Crescent  
RINGWOOD VIC 3134