



Military Historical Society of Australia

Queensland Division

Record of the meeting held at Harvey Bay RSL Boardroom on Saturday 21 January 2023

Neil Dearberg opened the meeting at 10.35am and welcomed both members and guests

Present: David Geck, Russell Paten, Paul Newton, Ray Eustace, Cameron Elmes, Ian Curtis, Neil Dearberg, Gordon Dickensen, Digby Lawrence, Peter Hart, Jim Martin, Kerrilee Fuary, Allan Fuary, Angela Cathouras, Graham Cross, Wuzzy Alford, Anthony Staunton.

Apologies: Robert Smith, Gary Ewart, Andrew Hall, Greg Ivey, Dianne Melloy, Jacques Follet, Ray Alcorn, Robert Simpson, Graeme Jardine-Vidgeon, Jim Nuttal, Peter Denham, Robert Byrne, John Casey, Don Baylon, Ron Sutton, David Kemp

Guest Speakers: **The first Guest Speaker was Cameron Elmes** who presented, Not Kazakhstan, not Nevada...it's South Australia's MARALINGA



In 2022 Cameron and two of his friends undertook a trip to South Australia and to visit Maralinga, a site that he had wanted to visit for a long time.

Maralinga was the scene of UK nuclear testing and was contaminated with radioactive waste in the 1950s and early 1960s. Maralinga was surveyed by Len Beadell in the early 1950s. It followed the survey of Emu Field, which was further north and where Operation Totem with two nuclear tests was conducted (Emu Field was found to be too remote a site for further tests). The

Australian Government gave the British Government permission to test nuclear devices on Section 400 at Maralinga

Section 400

Section 400 at Maralinga is a rectangular section of land, about 48 kilometers east to west and 65 kilometers north to south, which is located about 400 kilometers north-west of Ceduna, South Australia.

The British Government built permanent accommodation and work buildings at Maralinga for a staff of up to 2,000 people. Most of the buildings were at the southern end of the site, at Maralinga Village. Atomic tests were conducted at the Maralinga Forward Area, about 30 km north of Maralinga Village. Seven full scale atomic bomb tests (major trials) and many hundreds of smaller test explosions (minor trials) were conducted. The test areas were connected by an array of roads, many of which are still useable today.

On 27 September 1956, **Operation Buffalo** commenced at Maralinga. The operation consisted of the testing of four fission bombs. Two were set atop towers, one at ground level, and one released by a Royal Air Force Vickers Valiant bomber from a height of 9,100 m (30,000 ft). This was the first launching of a British atomic weapon from an aircraft.

Operation Antler followed in 1957. Antler was designed to test the triggering mechanisms of the weapons. Three tests began in September. The first two tests were conducted from towers; the last was suspended from balloons. Yields from the weapons were 1 kiloton, 6 kilotons and 25 kilotons respectively.

As well, over 600 'minor trials' dispersed long-lived radioactivity to the local environment

Parts of the Forward Area were radioactively contaminated by the British tests. Most of the British departed the site in the early 1960s but returned in 1964, and in 1967 (codenamed Operation Brumby) to conduct clean-ups of the contaminated sites. The goals of this operation were 'to reduce the level of contamination and to perform such other operations' as were considered necessary for closing the sites.

The British Government then reported that the testing sites were satisfactorily decontaminated (erroneously)

Today Maralinga Tjarutja (MT) is the Aboriginal Incorporation created by Act of Parliament - the Maralinga Tjarutja Land Rights Act 1984 (the Act) - to own and manage the Maralinga Tjarutja Lands (the Lands).

MT, which is governed by a Council of traditional owners, also performs a broader function in service delivery and supporting economic development on the Lands, including tourism.

MT is responsible for discharging obligations under the Maralinga Land Environment Management Plan which include:

- Control visitor access to Section 400 and the forward area by refusing access to persons who do not have a Permit under the Act and permitting persons with a Permit to have access under supervision.
- Ensure that no person who is permitted to enter Section 400 travels outside Maralinga Village on Section 400 unless accompanied by a caretaker.
- Monitor and record any unauthorised access to Section 400 and to notify MT.
- Report any suspicion of significant radioactive, chemical or physical hazard to the South Australian Environmental Protection Authority ("EPA") and to cooperate with the EPA and taking temporary measures to deal with any such hazard.
- Maintain the signs at the Watson and Emu barriers, Taranaki and Maralinga Village which give contingency advice.
- Monitor on a six-monthly basis, all burial trench boundary markers and debris pits.
- Undertake the radiation boundary sign inspection at the Taranaki site every 2 months.
- Assist and facilitate all representatives of MT, the State and Commonwealth who are performing duties under the Maralinga Hand Bank Deed and Maralinga Land and Environment Management Plan and
- Remove physical debris and hazards which may be dangerous to visitors to Section 400.

Cameron gave a detailed overview of his trip and the 6-hour tour and camping facilities at Maralinga. His presentation included a detailed set of slides.

The Second Guest Speaker was Russell Paten who spoke on 'Finding Donald, The mystery Great War Soldier. He explained that after a talk with his aunt, the name Donald and a set of post cards written home during Donald service how he tracked down Donald who had been writing to Edith Skinner.



So who was Donald? By analysing the post cards that Edith Skinner had kept all her life and using various databases and tool Russell was able to identify the man he was looking for as, Donald McIntyre McKillop a school teacher from the Glen Innes area who served with the 33rd Battalion

Donald was born in Beardy Plains (near Glen Innes in 1884. He enlisted 19 November 1915 in Armidale joining the 33rd Battalion. After arriving at Devonport on 9 July 1916 he suffered from a hernia complaint and it was not until 14 July 1917 that he was declared fit and joined his battalion. The Battalion took part in the 3rd Battle of Ypres and attacked on 12 October losing many men, many of the men simply disappeared in the mud, never to be found. Donald McIntyre

McKillop was one of those men. He is commemorated on Panel 23, Menin Gate, Ypres.

Russell is currently writing Donald full story and it will be published shortly. (Hopefully we will be able to publish it in *TRIBUTE*) The research is a good example of finding the story of our fallen.

Allan Fuary donated a book, Tobruk, by Peter Fitzsimmons to both speakers. Thank you Allan.

SHOW AND TELL

Allan Fuary



Allan demonstrated the modern Tiered Body Armour System (TBAS) that is worn by the Professional Military forces of today. He provided all who attended a copy of his note. He briefly spoke about a number of the items, including ammunition, the pouches, a water bladder that replaced the water bottles, and it 50kg plus weight.

Wuzzy Alford



The Pre-Federation Uniform above is located in the Hervey Bay RSL Foyer which was donated by a local family. Wuzzy challenged the description on the uniform on display. It was later confirmed by Paul Newton that Wuzzy was correct and that after 1893 the Queensland Defence Force changed back from Khaki to Scarlet.

Russell Paten

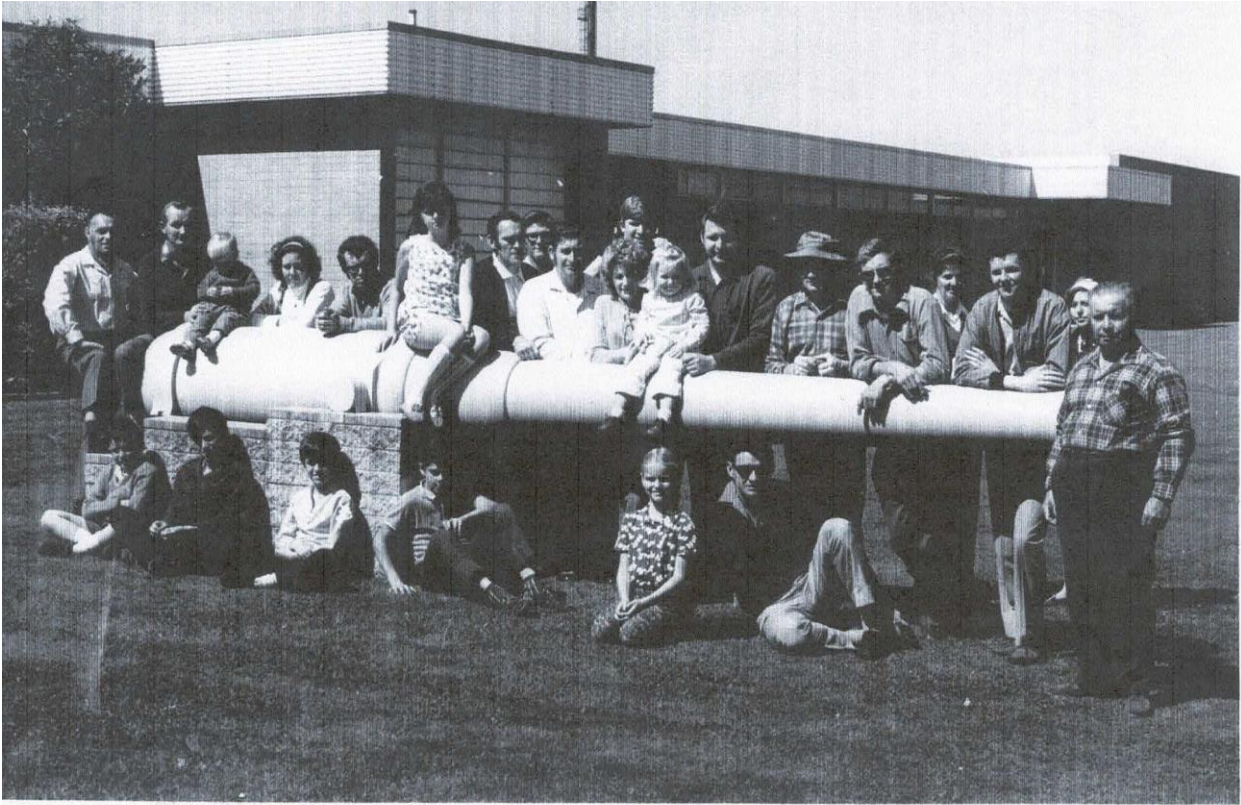
Russell circulated the post cards from Donald McIntyre McKillop for members to see. He also spoke about the recently published book, 'Feathers in the Cap, Geoffrey Leonard Hart.'

For members information the key web-site that was used to find Donald was – www.aid.adfa.edu.au You can search the database by Name, Regimental Number, Address, Place of Birth, All Fates and Date of Fate.

Ian Curtis

Ian gave a quick overview of his presentation that was postponed due to Cameron Elmes excellent Maralinga presentation. Queensland Schools@War will appear in a later edition of *TRIBUTE*.

Paul Newton



The names currently identified are;

Rear Row Standing L – R Stan Robinson, Tom Williams, -----, Val Trill, Steven Trill, Sharon Snelgrove (sitting on Cannon) George Snelgrove, Jerry Van Wyke, Don Wright, Ross Hanson (tall fellow behind the lady), -----, -----, -----, Sid Wigzell, John Duncan, Mrs Stan Robertson, -----, -----, Sam Trill

Front Row L – R, -----, -----, -----, -----, -----, George Dean with daughter on left.

Paul showed members a picture of the MHSA (Q) circa 1970 picture of members and their families at a Christmas function in front of the Armstrong Disappearing Gun which is/was located in the Car Park area at Ampol in Brisbane. Some names have been identified. The Secretary stated he would look at the records of the MHSA (Q) which may help in identifying other names. (Unfortunately, the MHSA (Q) records held only go back to 1998)



The Disappearing Gun and Crew C1890's at Fort Lytton

David Geck



David displayed both officers cap and pilot helmet of Squadron Leader Spencer RAF which were donated to the Maryborough Air Museum. Squadron Leader Spencer flew at Maralinga, and was based at the time in Singapore.

'Anthony Staunton

A George Cross holder, a larrikin Edward Medal recipient and was a deserter a hero?

The Edward Medal (EM), created in 1907 was a British gallantry award for bravery in mines and industry that existed from 1907 until 1971 when all living recipients on 21 October that year, were deemed George Cross (GC) holders. Originally for bravery in the UK, the award was extended to cover the Dominions and India thanks to the financial support from Sir Malcolm McEacharn, Australian businessman who from 1901 until 1903 had been a member of the first Australian Parliament.

Frank Duller GC (formerly EM)

Eight EM awards were gazetted for actions in Australia between 1909 and 1925. Only Frank Duller, lived long enough to be deemed a GC holder on 21 October 1971. He died on 11 January 1983 in England. In July 1918, at Mount Morgan, Queensland, three charges were set in an underground mine and a miner named Joga did not reach safety in time and was injured when the first charge exploded. Two miners, Duller and Michael Fogarty rushed from safety and managed to drag Joga free before a second charge exploded.

Seven of the Australian EM recipients were awarded the EM (Mines) including Duller and Fogarty whose awards were gazetted in 1919. The book *For Gallantry* by Craig Blanch published in 2020, states that it is unknown whether Duller, ever knew of the 1971 decision that deemed him a GC holder. It was only in the last ten years that Melbourne researcher, Paul Street, found evidence that that showed Duller had been living on 21 October 1971, when surviving EM recipients were deemed GC holders.

Matthew James Campbell EM

The only EM (Industry) recipient was Matthew James Campbell who was working with the NSW Public Works which was replacing all the sewage treatment plants in the North Shore of Sydney. On 25 October 1924, Campbell had finished repairing a leaking chute at about 25 metres down. He and two others were about to be lowered further when part of the winching mechanism failed causing the other two to fall out of the bucket. At the risk of his life Campbell managed to grab the two as they were about to fall but only managed to hold on to one man. Campbell was awarded the EM in 1925 for his bravery.

The fate of Campbell after the presentation of his award was unknown until Paul Street's research revealed that Campbell was accidentally killed at Granville nearly 30 years earlier on 24 July 1943. The story of Matthew James Campbell EM, 'A real larrikin hero', authored by Paul Street was published in the British magazine *Medal News* in its September 2022 edition. (Note – The Secretary has a copy of the article if requested)



Robert J Kirkham EM

Robert John Kirkham – Australian soldier or EM recipient or both

I would be delighted if Robert John Kirkham who served with the 3rd Australian Tunnelling Company on the Western Front in 1916 and 1917 is the same man as Robert John Kirkham, Fourth Class Examiner in the Department of Munitions Inspectorate and was the ninth Australian EM recipient.

The claim that the Australian soldier and the EM award are the same man has been on an Australian website at https://www.tunners.net/profiles_photos/

As of 30 November 2022 the website has added the following:

[tunners.net](https://www.tunners.net) comment:

Given there were multiple ‘Robert John Kirkham’s in the UK at the time, and the known history of our Tunneller, it is not known for sure that they are the same man.

2480 Sapper Robert John Kirkham enlisted in January 1916 and allotted to the Mining Corps. He later transferred to the 3rd Australian Tunnelling Company. The 2nd reinforcements for the Mining Corps embarked on 31 March 1916 at Sydney, NSW, aboard HMAT A16 (*Star of Victoria*) which arrived at Marseille, France on 17 May. His service record does not indicate that

he was sent to England in the following ten months. There is no record of his detachment to work in a Munitions Factory in England. There is no mention of the award of the EM. There is a record that he was paid before going on leave to England in January 1918, that he arrived in England but did not return from leave. On 21 July 1920 he was discharged on account of 'illegal absence'.

I am sceptical the Australian soldier and the British Munitions Examiner are same man since the only evidence so far is that both men have the same name.

(More information is available on request)

Graham Cross



Graham is looking for more information on the above badge

President Report

The President advised the members that over the Christmas / New Year period the MHSA (Q) had lost two members, Allan Limpus and Jim Molan.

The Next meeting 11 March will be held at the Gympie Airfield, Kybong. Planning in conjunction with the Gympie Aero Club will see a variety of old War Birds fly in and be available for inspection on the ground. Military Jeeps Club is also attending, along with Gliders and a parachute jump. The airfield on the day will be open to the public and a BBQ and Coffee Van will be available.

Actions

1. A suitable speaker – Neil Dearberg
2. Brochure to promote membership – Russell Paten

The May meeting will be held in Brisbane. The Secretary is to investigate Fort Lytton

The President thanked Ray Eustace for the use of the Hervey Bay RSL Club.

Minutes of the Previous Meeting: The Record of the Meeting held at Cooroy RSL on Saturday 26 November 2022 have been sent to members so it was summarised by the Secretary and accepted on a motion by Allan Fuary and seconded by Cameron Elmes

Correspondence: The correspondence consists of a number of requests for information by researchers. This information has been circulated to members for comment. The Secretary thanked all members who had responded.

Financial Statement: The Financial Statement showing a credit balance of \$7047.68 was accepted and payments confirmed on a motion by Anthony Staunton. and seconded by David Geck. CARRIED. The statement was circulated to all present.

General Business:

1. Wuzzy Alford thanked the Military Spectacular Committee for their efforts. Although disappointing that it did not go ahead because of Defence Force commitments he spoke on behalf of all members in thanking the committee for their drive and commitment.
2. Update – Presentation to Elsie Meyers and Maryborough Military and Colonial Museum. The Secretary told the members he was still trying to get an engraver at a suitable price to have the pewter trays engraved.
3. TRIBUTE 2003 – The first Tribute for 2023 will be published in February. Due to the passing of two of our members their stories will appear in this edition.
4. TROVE – The Secretary advised the members that due to lack of funding by the new Federal Government there is concern that TROVE will be closed down. The President of the Federation of Australian Historical Societies has encouraged all group to write to the government impressing on them the importance of Trove as a research tool. **Action** – Secretary to write to Federal Government
5. POLO SHIRTS – David Geck spoke about a Polo shirt for members. **Action** – David Geck to provide further information.

Next Meeting: The next meeting will be held at Gympie Airfield, Kybong on Saturday 11 March 2023

Meeting closed at 1.50 pm