

THE ARTILLERY NEWS.

SEPTEMBER 2008 - NOVEMBER 2008



Official Correspondence.

R.A.A Assoc. of Tas. Inc.

Hon. Secretary, Norman B. Andrews OAM., SBStJ.

Tara Room, 24 Robin St;

Newstead. Tas. 7250.

E-Mail: forfar@gmail.com

R.A.A. Association of Tasmania Inc.

Homepage: <http://www.tasartillery.com/>

THE END OF AN ERA!

The following note was received from 16 Field Battery, Royal Australian Artillery HQ in Launceston - we are now witnessing the close of a glorious era of Tasmania's Artillery history.



16th FIELD BATTERY

Royal Australian Artillery

Paterson Barracks, 2 Saint John St, LAUNCESTON TAS 7250

Dear Fellow Gunner / Friend of the Battery,

I am pleased to advise that on **Sunday 05 Oct 08** 16 Field Battery will be firing our Guns for the last time. I would like to extend an invitation to you to join the members of the unit on this historic occasion.

There will be no cost to yourself, and transport will be provided to move everyone from Paterson Barracks, Launceston, to Stony Head Training Area. **The transport will depart at 0700h.** You will be provided the

opportunity to observe the guns firing from both the Observation Post and also the Gunline. This also presents an excellent opportunity for families to discover what their partners / parents actually do when they deploy out to the field.

I extend the warmest Gunner Invitation to join with us at **Stony Head** on **05 Oct 08** to farewell the guns.

Please RSVP to my Executive Officer, CAPT Benny Gray by either phone (0409 980 066) or e-mail (benjamin.gray@defence.gov.au).

Regards

Chris Talbot

C.K. TALBOT

Major

Battery Commander

Tel: (03) 6327 7482

Fax: (03) 6327 7489

Mob: 0414 734 326

Email: chris.talbot@defence.gov.au

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING NOTICE

Advice has been received from our President **Stephen Carey** and Secretary **Norman Andrews**, that the AGM of the Royal Australian Artillery Association of Tasmania Inc. will be held in Launceston on **Sat 11th Oct. starting at 1400hrs.**

Location: The old **Bank of New South Wales Building** on the corner of Brisbane and St. John Sts., next to the old Launceston Hotel. The entrance door is on Brisbane St., (next to Wendy's) - **Workers Rehabilitation and Compensation Tribunal offices** - stairs or Lift to **Floor 2..**

R.A.A.A.T. NORTHERN HISTORICAL WING.

The Royal Australian Artillery Association of Tasmania – the Northern social and historical group – meet informally at 2.00p.m. on the second Thursday in the months of - February, April, June, August, October and December – usually at the Inveresk Museum railway precinct Friends' Lounge - to the right, inside the main doors, just past and opposite the main desk. However, in advent of a public holiday - when the access to the pay car park is unavailable - we do arrange to meet elsewhere at a spot we advertise in the Meetings Section in the local newspapers.

All RAAAT members, new or old gunners of any rank or specialized corps associated with Artillery units - and interested guests are always welcome. If you want to turn up to share any information or just have a chat – as mentioned, it is totally informal, as a rule.

We only ask that, if you can, bring a 'plate to share' at afternoon tea time and put a little change in the kitty for the tea/coffee. Depending on the things to be talked over, the discussions are usually only of 60 – 90 minutes duration, but occasionally we do drag it out with a few good old artillery stories, or if we have a special guest speaker.

R.A.A.A.T. HISTORICAL & SOCIAL WING AUGUST MEETING

Our last informal gathering, held on **14th August 2008**, was attended by RAAAT members:- Des Salter, Lloyd Saunders, Gunter Breier, Graeme Petterwood, Norman Andrews (Secretary & Meeting Convenor), Marc Smith, Bevan Filche, Rick Wood and Trevor Giles.

Norm Andrews reminded us that several major artillery milestones were creeping closer and that we would be discussing, amongst other notable events, the **150th Anniversary of the Launceston Volunteer Artillery** – which is due on 6th June 2010. The Social Committee is open for ideas.

It is envisaged that this important anniversary will be celebrated and shared by the local **16 Field Battery R.A.A.**, and the community of Launceston and environs, on the nearest suitable day - except the Sabbath.

The other items that were discussed included:

22/10/08. - EL Alamein Day 2008 – Memorial Service

The El Alamein Day anniversary memorial services in **Hobart** this year would have fallen on the same day at the Royal Hobart Show, so, the Association and other interested parties have opted to celebrate the occasion a day earlier on the **Domain at the Hobart Cenotaph** on **22nd October 2008** with the service commencing at **11.00 a.m.**

All visitors are asked to be seated by that time. As the area is open to the elements it is recommended that visitors dress suitably for the occasion.

To ensure that the Launceston contingent has a comfortable trip and can safely arrive prior to the service – intending members, guests and any carers will need to embus at **Paterson Barracks at 7.30 a.m. for a 7.45 a.m. departure.**

There is limited bus seating capacity so details will need to be confirmed prior to, or at, our next meeting.

Contact Mr. Norm Andrews OAM - Ph: (03) 6344 8307

22/11/08. – Annual Function (Northern Branch)

The Social committee have advised that the **Kings Meadows Bowls Club** have again offered their premises as being available for our Northern annual evening function due on **22nd November 2008**. The social committee will check on costs and menu etc. as usual, and get back to the members with relevant details for consideration at our next Social Wing meeting. A few photos from our last event at KMBC are now available for publication - courtesy of Norman Andrews.

There were quite a few happy pics - but space is limited – so we picked the good-looking ones! You know who you are.



14/10/08. Proposed Next Historical Wing Meeting

In the event of our usual alternate venue not being available, or feasible, at the time, our member, Rick Wood, has advised that he could host the gathering at his home, if need be. Other members also made similar offers of assistance.

Our next informal gathering of the Social and Historical Wings will be held at a place that will be confirmed in the local press Community Notice Boards, as it falls on **Thursday 14th October 2008**, which is the official Launceston Show - People's Day.

A BRIEF REPORT ON THE LIVE SHOOT SATURDAY 28th June 2008 – by Graeme Petterwood

As mentioned in our last newsletter, a relatively late invitation was received by members and invited guests to attend an 'open' day at the live exercises and shoot at the Stoney Head Training Area on Saturday 28th June 2008. Unfortunately, we could not contact all those who might have been interested within the acceptance period, so, sadly, they missed out on a great outing.

This will be discussed during our later meetings and hopefully we may come up with a better way to get the information out in future.

Of course, all northern based R.A.A.T members who attended our '**2nd week in the month**' Thursday 2.00 p.m. meetings at the Inveresk Museum - every '**even-numbered**' month - were advised and we tried to contact comrades but this is a bit '*hit and miss*'.

However we did get a few extra travellers who came down to a breezy Stoney Head for a wonderful experience. The invitation read:

"The aim is to display the current capability of our weapon systems and the actual equipment used by today's serving members in order to gain your assistance in promoting the Reserve far and wide with those within your circles of influence. The activities are to be conducted on Saturday 28 Jun 08 between 11:00AM and 3:00PM within SHTA so any southern travellers will need to be at Youngtown

Depot by 9:30AM. 12/40 RTR is able to provide transport from Youngtown Depot to SHTA and return for anyone interested in the day's activity"

The schedule for the event was well organized- the visitors, both infantry and artillery veterans, had complete visual and physical access to nearly all areas along with an official guide who brought us up to the firing lines and explained the operation to those of us who had nearly forgotten the smell of cordite.

The actual business-end of the schedule was as follows:

"It will involve fire demonstrations and displays of combined arms cooperation by current Army Reserve serving members of 144 Sig Sqn, 16 Fd Bty and 12/40 RTR. Viewing activities will include:- A 40mm grenade launcher display supported by 7.62mm Mag 58 machine guns; 105mm artillery engaging over open sights; section and platoon activities; and viewing a section in defence live fire."

The Stoney Head invitation day started with the gathering of visitors at the Youngtown base of the 12/40 RTR and the few introductions to the southern infantry visitors were made to those who were going by bus. A fine looking bunch – and they proved to be great company!

The trip took about an hour and, when we arrived, we were given an obligatory lecture on safety procedures and a general briefing of what was in the timeline that we were allowed on the range.

New buildings and necessary facilities erected since our last visit have given the once barren area a look of permanence and efficiency. A bit more 'comfort'.

Some of us took an early morning 'stretch-the-legs' break, then a short walk over to the old 'Oxley House' location and reminisced a little as we stood near the only remnant left standing – the stone chimney - where the late **Capt. John Gunn M.B.E.** left his mark in the concrete base by sitting on it before it had completely hardened off. Those were the 'good old days' for many of us!



**The remains of old 'Oxley House' – Stoney Head Training Area.
Late Captain John Gunn M.B.E.**

Our bus then took us to our first stop – that of observing an Infantry patrol who had encountered a 'sniper' hidden in the heavy high grass and wild shrubbery that grows along that section of Tasmanian north coast - the enemy had to be located and then the patrol had to flush him out for 'adequate treatment'.

It took a while to complete the exercise but all aspects that would normally occur in such an instance were undertaken and explained to us as they unfolded. There had to be no slacking or room for error – this training was *'fair dinkum'* - even if it were only *'blanks'* were being used in this operation.

Afterwards, we had the opportunity to talk with the men and inspect their equipment. A most enlightening experience – these fine young men really are an asset to our defence forces - and it was a spirited conversation as we related tales of the *'what is'* against the *'what was'* rules of engagement that we knew.

However, mainly due to time restraints - and restricted access to the active firing ranges - the Infantry grenade-firing and machine-gun exercise, which had been going on all morning, was deemed too hazardous for us older members to attempt an inspection.

The ground in the area was pretty rough even for the young 70 - 80 y.o.'s. - and the weather was quite brisk and breezy so close to the coast – but, for we old fellows with all the usual the problems of our years – no expense was spared.

We were given a hot drink, courtesy of the 12/40 RTR, to keep out the chill - then we ate on the run and went, by bus, to the gun positions some kilometers away for the highlight of the day – the live shoot.

By the time we arrived, the guns had been deployed and were in use - doing initial ranging exercises – the *'enemy'* had been sighted and were to be engaged! Our infantry comrades – including some serving members – were fascinated, and rightly so. Artillery in action is a dramatic sight!

We were to see two aspects of a live shoot that some of us had probably experienced previously – but an awful long time ago - and with rather more antiquated weaponry, like the fine old 25-pounder gun howitzers, that were phased out in the 1960's. I must say that they were excellent for their era and were a great efficient work-horse of a weapon and still would not be out of place in a battle - but they are historical pieces now to the new gunners. A piece from *'Artillery – Modern Military Series'* by Curt Johnson – Octopus Books 1975, is worth quoting:

"The Mark 2 25-pounder was a remarkable weapon with exceptional features. It could be emplaced in one minute, had a lightweight firing platform with allowed all-round traverse and replaceable tube-liners which could be changed in the field if necessary. It had a firing rate of 5 rpm, a range of 13,400 yards (12.25 kms) and an elevation range from -5 to +40 degrees."

Even the 105mm. howitzers are fairly old-fashioned now, in artillery terms, but they pack an awesome punch, and can deliver a telling *'message'* where it counts, when handled by dedicated well-trained gunners.

These gun-crews were good – as most of us old gunners would be the first to admit. They were a credit to the 16 Field Battery training program, their officers

and NCO's – and they made us R.A.A. veterans feel very proud of our own Artillery heritage and the memories of gunfire and cordite from decades ago..

The 16th Fd. Battery Commander, **Major Chris Talbot**, made time to welcome us to the safety area on-site, and he provided us with a running commentary of what was occurring down the slope at the busy end of the guns.

Thanks Chris! For making the new procedures easy to understand.

The target was located in the distance – close to a kilometer away - hidden partly on the slope of a wooded hill and the 'open-sight' aiming technique was being used by the gun crew.

It was awesome watching the activity, the reaction to the fire orders - and then the organised 'bedlam' that occurs once the round leaves the gun with that hollow thump that all half-deaf old artillerymen would still recognise.

The call to reload - and then, for us idle visitors, the count-down!

The first count is how long the shell takes to cover the distance – those with binoculars had them fixed on the knoll – then the red fiery signs of the explosion, the black and grey billowing of broiling smoke – all is quiet, except down at the guns - and then we start the count until the sound from the hill comes back and hits us with a solid crunch. A pattern is then laid down by the guns, more shouted orders, more bursts of smoke erupts from the hill – splashes of red-hot shrapnel – the hoarse calls of the gun-crew, fire again, reload!

Then, as the call comes - 'target destroyed'. – one last round is sent on its way to clear the gun - and again we have time to count those 6 - 7 seconds from that hollow ringing thump to the rebounding crruump!.



The moment of truth – open sight shooting!

16 Field Battery gunners in a realistic 'live shoot' training action at Stoney Head Training Area. Northern Tasmania. 28th. June 2008

Following the first display - where the sighted target was bracketed and then obliterated by gunfire – a second phase was commenced where the target was located on a map reference and a more routine laying down of gunfire was employed using Observers and radio transmissions to the guns.

Again, the whole operation was spectacular as many of the older gunners had never seen the whole operation of *getting a round to land where it was needed*. However, as arranged in this instance, all the main essentials were located in one place for the demonstration so that we had an excellent chance to see the '*whole works*'. Of course, we knew the principles – but there were many new technological advancements to ask questions about – and we did!

All good things must come to an end - and time soon ran away from us as we inspected the gun areas and the guns, talked to the gunners and observers – and then made our way back to the bus for our journey back to the Youngtown depot so that our non-local visitors could get moving before another mid-Winter night closed in. The hour trip back into the city was a vocal straining experience as we all tried to get a word in about something we had seen - it would have taken a bit more than laryngitis to quieten us down. It had been a great, great – great day!



Part of the invited group of ex- Infantry and Artillery personnel.

The Artillery News.

Graeme E. Petterwood. (Editor).

P.O. Box 10, Ravenswood. 7250. Tasmania.

Email: pwood@vision.net.au

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