

NEW ZEALAND PERMANENT FORCE OLD COMRADES ASSN INC

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NEWSLETTER No 58

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LAST POST: Major B.K. (Bart) Hendl, 2 Apr 88, at Wellington.
1614 B.C. (Barney) Pussell, 10 Jun 88, at Waikanae.
1560 J.H. (Henry) Keen, 1 Jul 88, at Whangarei.
36094 G.W. (George) Elsdon, 7 Jul 88, at Auckland.

GONE NO ADDRESS: L Bdr P.A. Cook LAST KNOWN ADDRESS: Waiouru

NEW MEMBERS: 33310 R.(Bob) Conrad, 126 Chichester Drive, Papakura.
32030 R.W. (Ron) Hayman, Box 297, Silverdale.
E36850 Capt B.D. (Brian) Millyn, 24 Parke Estate Rd, Papakura.

RESIGNATION: A.H. (Taffy) Williams.

CHANGES OF ADDRESS: R.B. Anderson to 10/71 Corbel St, Shelley,
Perth, West Australia.

Capt T.A. Ellen RA to 17 (Corunna) Fd Bty RA, 26 Fd Regt, Baker
Barracks, Thorney Island, Emsworth, Hants PO10 8DY, U.K.

W01(MG) B.S. Frances to School of Artillery, Army Schools, ATG,
Private Bag, Waiouru.

J. Graham to 1/6 Solway Place, Mt Maunganui.

M.J. Hellyer to 88 Stanley Point Rd, Devonport, Auckland 9.

M.T. Hotene to Box 4190, Hamilton East.

Sgt R.P. Kinzett to 16 Julia St, Pahiatua.

Capt E.L.A. Kitney to 3/23 Byron Ave, Takapuna.

Major K.F. Lee ED to 22 Cranwell St, Churton Park, Wellington.

J.G. Moore to 15 Finlayson St, Wollongong 2500, N.S.W.

J.G. Murray to CB No A8 Houhora, RD4 Kaitaia, Northland.

W01 P.B. O'Connor to 3 Fd Regt RNZA, Burnham Camp.

SSgt G.J. Pickering to HQ Fort Dorset, Seatoun, Wellington 3.

Major D.H. Rollo MBE to 317A Kapiti Rd, Paraparaumu.

Sgt J.N. Te Morenga to 9 Merritt Way, Newlands, Wellington 4.

SSgt I.S. Trott to 4 Med Bty, Box 212, Hamilton.

Lt Col A.R. Vail to 50A Raukura St, Turangi.

C.R. Wotherspoon to 4 Laurel Wood Ave, Pukekohe.

Lt Col R.J.S. Munro to 245 Tay St, Invercargill.

M.R. Wicksteed to 11 Orchard St, Wadestown, Wellington.

BADGES: Having waited many weeks for new dies to be made we were recently informed by the die-maker that he had 'mucked' one of them up, and had to make another. We ask those who have paid for badges but not yet received them to bear with us a little longer.

REVEILLE: Doc Bennett (7 Wing), referring to the article in Newsletter No 57, also deplures the sounding of the Rouse when Reveille should be sounded. He has suggested we open a campaign to educate erring bandsmen, and has offered to produce music cards for them. We applaud his offer, and will be looking at his suggestion at the next committee meeting.

3 FIELD REGIMENT 50th ANNIVERSARY: Paul O'Connor, the RSM, writes that the anniversary will be celebrated during Queen's Birthday week-end 1990. A committee has been formed and further details will be issued in the near future. He hopes to see a good muster of RF ex-Cadre Staff personnel on the occasion.

NZPFOCA ANNUAL REUNION: Just a reminder that our own reunion will be held in Taupo on 11-12-13 November 1988. Arrangements will be similar to those of last year. Full details will be issued in the September Newsletter.

ASSOCIATION PHOTOGRAPHS: We have a collection of photographs presented from time to time by members of the Association since it was formed in 1934. Some of them date back over 100 years, and all of them relate to the history of the Permanent Force and RNZA.

Members who attended the 1987 reunion will recall seeing on display four albums of these photographs. The member who paid for the albums, painstakingly inserted the photographs in chronological order, and then presented the finished work to us is Jack Keinzley. I am sure you will join with me in applauding his monumental contribution to our assets.

NEWS FROM AROUND AND ABOUT: Bill Breen likes Rotorua (especially the Waikato Draught in the RSA!), keeps fit and well with gardening and the occasional successful attack on the trout population, in the smoking and barbecuing of which he has become adept. In his spare time he paints in oils and recently had three paintings on display in Auckland on behalf of the Arthritis Foundation. At a recent competition in Rotorua we understand he won first prize. Congratulations Bill. Keep it up!

J.G. (Aussie) Moore has recently retired from the Ministry of Defence (Civilian Branch) in Waiouru and returned to his native Australia. We wish him well in his retirement.

WO1 (Master Gunner) B.S. (Brian) Frances is now President of the Waiouru Gunners Club. Brian qualified MG on a Canadian Master Gunners Course conducted at CFB, Galetown, from Aug 86 to Jun 87, and assumed the appointment of Master Gunner at the School of Artillery, Waiouru, in November 1987. We congratulate him on his achievement.

Sgt R.P. Kinzett has been posted to EDP, Porirua, (attached Army General Staff), for their General Purpose Computing System. He will be there for at least a year.

David (Spike) Hughes writes that in his retirement most of his energies are expended in being President of the Upper Hutt Bridge Club.

Bill Hopkins took up tramping at 65, and since then has 'done' the Milford Track (twice), the Hollyford Track, the Routeburn Track, the Greenstone Valley Track - and has climbed Mt Tongariro. He would like to climb Ngauruhoe and Ruapehu - but thinks '...they might be a bit steep for an old bloke!' Can any other 'old bloke' beat this?

Phil Calvert in Australia is fighting a dour battle against cancer, and we are all happy to know he is winning.

Rusty Vail is now in Turangi and working for the Prisoners Aid and Rehabilitation Society as their Drug and Alcohol Counsellor. He says '... back to Waiouru type weather but 30 years on ...'

WO1 H.J. (Henry) Macown is now Sergeant Major of the Army. He is the fifth to hold the appointment, and the second Gunner. As the senior Warrant Officer in the Army his role is one of liaison between the WOs, NCOs, Men and Women, and the CGS. He listens to soldiers' comments and complaints, and is responsible to the General for their discipline and well-being. In addressing a gathering of former Artillerymen at a recent Gunners Day dinner in Levin conducted by the Horowhenua Artillery Association he stated the Army was well-equipped, in good heart, and as good as it ever was.

Away out east in Te Kaha George (Nifty) Coe has had trouble with his back (wrestling with the tow-bar of a loaded trailer), and has developed double vision, which means wearing a patch over one eye while driving. We hope you are soon OK, George. In the meantime be sure you wear the patch when someone is paying you money!

J.B. (Brian) O'Connor (Paul's father), still chases the odd golf ball into the 19th hole but otherwise keeps out of trouble.

Those members who resided in the Waiouru Camp Officers and Warrant Officers quarters during the 30 years or so after World War 2 will no doubt recall with pleasure the name of Jimmy Trotter, and how well he looked after both the quarters and their occupants.

Jim came to New Zealand as an orphan in the 1920s, joined the Army in 1942, was graded Home Service only, and posted to Waiouru where he has lived and worked ever since. Retiring as a Sergeant in 1963, he joined the civilian staff and carried on. On 8 Jun 88 Jim turned 80, and we were pleased to send him a card on behalf of the many members of our Association who appreciated his services in the past. Although no longer on the payroll Jimmy has a permanent billet in the camp, and still makes himself useful around Headquarters. Well done, Jim!

Wally Sherson has had a bad spin of ill health; we hope he soon gets back to normal.

THE LIGHT GUN v. THE 25-POUNDER

(Continued from Newsletter 57)

Decision on the calibre is said to have been reached 'by agreement' with the other members of NATO, most if not all were already equipped with field and/or SP guns of 105 mm. Although experience with the 25-pr (87.6-mm) and the German 88-mm guns during World War 2 convinced many experts that 88-mm was the best size for a field artillery projectile, adoption of a new gun of that calibre would have left Britain out on a limb in the event of a major conflict, especially when it came to ammunition supply. So she was obliged to fall into line and adopt 105-mm.

To digress a moment, before the decision was taken the United States and other NATO countries favoured six-gun batteries. One of the arguments advanced by the Americans in favour of a 105-mm (33-lb or 15-kg) shell was that six of these projectiles deposited on a target the same weight of metal as eight 25-prs. From a simple arithmetic point of view this argument is near enough correct, but it ignores the primary role of field artillery which is the close support of infantry. The man with rifle and bayonet well knows that eight shells on a given area will keep more enemy heads down than six - even if they are a few pounds lighter.

The new equipment comes with two barrels. That normally fitted for service fires the same ammunition as the Abbot with a like performance, i.e. an extreme range of 17,500 metres. For training purposes, and to use up the large quantities of American M1 ammunition supplied for the pack howitzer, a second barrel is provided which gives a range of 11,000 metres. A barrel can be changed in about two hours.

Barrels are auto-frettaged throughout, i.e. pre-stressed. Each is fitted with a muzzle-brake easily removable for cleaning, but with no securing screw likely to cause a dangerous constriction

in the barrel, as sometimes occurred with the 25-pr version.

Each barrel is fitted with a closed-jaw breech ring, not the open-jaw type as found on the 25-pr. The latter tended to weakness in the internal angles, and I know of at least one which failed while firing super plus increment, killing two members of the detachment. With the closed-jaw ring the firing mechanism is necessarily totally enclosed within the breech block, but is no more difficult to dismantle or assemble. Firing is electric with Abbot ammunition, but by percussion with American M1. The LBM in each case is mounted on top of the breech ring, designed to make opening and closing of the breech easy at all angles of elevation.

To permit operation at high angle, i.e. between QEs of 45° (800 mils) and 70° (1244 mils), rear trunnions are fitted, which call for a gun balancing gear, a simple spring tension type requiring virtually no maintenance. A buffer cut-off gear similar in principle to that of the 25-pr shortens recoil as the gun is elevated, thus preventing the breech striking the ground.

Sighting arrangements are extremely simple; the layer has his dial sight, cross-levelling gear, QE scale with accompanying bubble, plus a telescope for anti-tank action. The sight carrier is attached directly to the left trunnion; there is no sight clino, separate range scales, MV correction plates, drift scale plate, TE scale - nor complicated gearing and linkages to get out of adjustment. All relevant range data come from the Command Post in the form of QE. Gone is that equipment designer's abortion the 'apparatus illuminating sights.' All scales and graticules are permanently illuminated by a nuclear light source; there are no batteries to worry about.

Now that we have changed over to the metric system all scales are in mils. The true mil is one thousandth part of a radian, i.e. there are 6283 in a circle, but for military purposes the circle has been divided into 6400, a figure more conveniently divisible. Thus one military mil equals 3.375 minutes of arc.

The light gun carriage has a box-type trail, the side members being of tubular section and bow-shaped, enabling both layer and breech number (No 2) to remain within the trail yet be clear of recoil. Top traverse is 5.5° (100 mils) right and left. In action the 900 x 16 wheels run on a circular platform reminiscent of the 25-pr, except that it is more robust, and is connected to the underside of the carriage by three short wire ropes instead of rigid metal stays. For travelling it is carried on top of the trail.

In the field the gun may be towed in the normal position but for long-distance travel at high speed it is traversed through 180° and the muzzle clamped over the trail eye. This 'folded' position makes a more stable load behind the towing vehicle as well as a compact load for air movement. Traversing of the piece requires the removal and replacement of the right gun wheel, which is fitted with a quick-release for the purpose, but can be done by a trained detachment in about two minutes. In New Zealand the normal towing vehicle is the Mercedes 1.5-tonne UNIMOG; in the UK the 1-ton Landrover with V8 engine.

The complete gun can be lifted by Chinook, Puma, and Sea King helicopters (not available in N.Z.); to be lifted by the Wessex the carriage and elevating mass are separated and re-assembled in the field. Reassembly takes only ten minutes using a single simple tool.

Probably the most impressive feature of the light gun when compared with the 25-pr is its weight. Despite its much greater power (muzzle energy/weight = 640 against 280 for the 25-pr), the light gun is only about 27 kg (60 lbs) heavier, an achievement due principally to the use of a very high quality steel developed by Firth Vickers, plus the employment of modern techniques of construction and testing. These include the explosive forming of complex shapes of steel sheet, a method cheaper than pressing.

However good a gun may be it is the shell which is the weapon. Projectiles include HE, carrier, cannister (anti-personnel up to 500 metres), HE squash-head (HESH for use against tanks up to 1200m). HE may also be used against tanks up to 2500 m. The carrier shells are ballistically matched to the standard HE, so in the CP there is no need for 'abnormal projectile' corrections. Fuze types include percussion, time and percussion (with mechanical time mechanism), and proximity. The Abbot shell (filled RDX/TNT) is significantly more lethal than the American M1; one authority makes it 1.5 times as lethal.

Maximum muzzle velocity (Abbot ammunition) is 709 m/sec (2325 feet a second) against 520 m/sec (1706 f/s) for the 25-pr.

Ammunition is 'separate' so the loading drill will be quite familiar to 25-pr men. There are seven charges, 1 to 6 and super. Range with Ch 6 is 15,000 metres, and with super 17,500 using Abbot ammunition. With the US M1 ammunition extreme range is only 11,000 m - with, of course, its own set of charges. Normal rate of fire = 3 rpm, intense = 6 rpm.

With the 'base-bleed' projectile range is 20,000 metres. In this a device within the base of the shell generates a gas pressure which tends to overcome the vacuum formed at the rear of a shell in flight, thus neutralising to some extent 'base drag' and so increasing range.

To conclude, here is some food for thought: when the Royal Artillery received the first of their Light guns in 1975 the price in the UK was £43,000 per complete equipment. Twelve years later in 1987 when the NZ Government bought the same guns made under licence in Australia (where they are called 'Hamel' guns), the price had climbed to SNZ 1,000,000 (yes, one million dollars!) for the same equipment. No doubt we are paying for Project Hamel, the four-year tooling-up exercise by Australian ordnance factories - or did the Australians see us coming?

UNOFFICIAL HISTORY 4

THE VON LUCKNER SAGA - FINALE DECEMBER 1917

By W.L.R.

The von Luckner saga, including the voyage of his raider Seeadler (sea eagle), his capture, escape from the POW camp on Motuihe Island, and subsequent recapture has been related by the media and other writers on a number of occasions. Here is another version of the closing chapter, recorded by a Gunner 'on the spot.'

Some years ago I had the good fortune as a student of New Zealand military history to meet the late Mr H.L. (Harry) Dixon, who during World War 1 was a Territorial Force Gunner stationed on North Head, Auckland. When Lt Cdr Count Felix von Luckner, his 2 IC Lt Kircheiss, and seven other Germans escaped from Motuihe on the

night of 13 Dec 1917 Harry was one of a search party later embarked on HM Cable Ship Iris to give chase. Although the keeping of diaries was strictly forbidden he was determined to make a written record of the Gunners' part in the operation. To this end he wrote a day-by-day account of events on pages torn from a penny notebook which he rolled up and stowed in the butt trap of his rifle; his oil bottle and pull-through he kept in his greatcoat pocket. Harry very kindly lent me the diary - plus some photographs taken by a member of the crew - and gave me permission to publish any part of it. From it I prepared the following story.

Harry's part in the operation began on Saturday morning 15 Dec when the search party including ten Gunners (two detachments each of five men), were ordered to report forthwith to the EC Yard (later known as the Artillery Yard), North Head. At least two members of the party were Regular Force, one of whom Gunner George Stride RN, later joined our Association but died in 1946. Unfortunately Harry did not record the names of the others.

From the Defence Wharf the men were transferred by lighter to Iris together with two QF 6-pr Nordenfelt guns on garrison mountings and pedestals, plus 150 rounds of ammunition. Normally these guns were employed in the anti-motor-torpedo-boat role, but had been dismounted for the search. To the astonishment of the Gunners another 250 rounds arrived on board in the afternoon!

Until 2230 hrs that night and all Sunday morning they were kept hard at work stowing stores and ammunition, 'installing' the guns, one forward, one aft. Each gun had to be manhandled to its appointed position and then secured to any suitable ships' fittings by chains and engineers' 'G' clamps. From the photograph of the forward gun in my possession the result would have been the envy of Mr Heath Robinson, and prompted snide remarks from the ship's crew on what would happen when it fired. The detachment awaited this event with some trepidation.

Iris sailed on Sunday 16 Dec, passing Tiritiri Matangi Island at 1300 hrs. Later in the afternoon two shots were fired from the forward gun to test the holding-down arrangements which held very well, much to the satisfaction of the detachment - and the chagrin of the crew!

At 1615 hrs off Cape Colville Iris sighted the scow Rangi who reported seeing the launch Pearl (on which von Luckner and his men had escaped), go alongside the scow Moa which then sailed eastward. Rangi also reported seeing the German Naval Ensign (made by the prisoners-of-war on Motuihe from flour bags), hoisted on Moa. Probably Pearl's approach would not have aroused Moa's suspicions because when he escaped von Luckner was dressed in a New Zealand Army uniform (including sword) stolen from the Camp Commandant's wardrobe! And two of his fellow-escapers were armed with rifles stolen from the Camp's armoury!

From Cape Colville Iris steamed to Cuvier Island (sighted on 17 Dec), signalled the island but obtaining no news of the escapers continued south to the Aldermen Islands, then to Mayor Island where a search party went ashore but found nothing. Here the after gun was successfully test-fired, a round which misfired being thrown overboard.

At this stage the search authorities correctly surmised that von Luckner would head for the Kermadec Islands to loot the stores

dumped there for the assistance of shipwrecked mariners, so Iris steered north.

The weather now turned dirty. Most of the Gunners became sea-sick and in that condition were obliged to secure the ammo which had broken loose and was 'sliding from one side of the ship to the other.' However, the Captain ordered the ship hove to and directed some of the crew to assist. The motion of the ship had also loosened the chains holding down the after gun which had to be re-secured. The rum issue, made daily at 2000 hrs, was particularly welcome on this occasion.

On Wednesday 19 Dec the Kermadecs were sighted. Two shots were fired at the goats on McCauley Island to test the after gun - but hit nothing. The test proved satisfactory.

Next day the OC search party and the First Officer landed on Curtis rock but found the stores there still intact. About midday he ordered a boat lowered and went aboard Rira, a two-masted schooner, which he searched but found everything in order. Rira had no news of the Germans. On his return the Gunners were ordered to assist in hoisting the boat inboard, but one of them dodged the job. He was later given a 'hiding' by one of his 'mates.' Such was Gunner justice 1917 pattern!

At 1120 hrs Friday 19 Dec the lookout reported a scow which proved to be Moa. As Iris closed she ordered Moa to identify herself but receiving no reply ordered the forward gun to fire a shot across her bows - and according to all other existing accounts this was done. However, when the layer tried to bring the gun to bear he found the ship's spare anchor - which was lashed to the deck in an upright position - obscured the line of fire. So, throwing protocol to the winds, he did the next best thing, and fired a round across her stern. Von Luckner did not argue the point; he hove to!

Three of the escapers, Merchant Navy cadets whom von Luckner had attested into the German Navy then rowed him over to Iris where he surrendered. A boat's crew was then sent to search Moa where the remaining Germans surrendered without any trouble. None of the firearms, hand grenades, nor the Commandant's sword stolen from Motuihe were found for, according to Moa's crew, the Germans had thrown them overboard when Iris fired. Moa was captured off Curtis rock from which the Germans had looted all clothing and provisions, and which they must have visited Thursday night or early Friday morning after Iris' search. The wily 'Sea Devil' and his crew were 'back in the bag' - but that is not quite the end of the story.

Possibly because most of the Germans enjoyed officer status they were given the comfortable cabins previously occupied by the gun detachments who were relegated to much less attractive quarters elsewhere. The Gunners resented being treated in a less favourable manner than prisoners they now had to guard, and complained bitterly but to no avail.

Another sore point arose from the sale of cigarettes and tobacco from the ship's canteen previously denied to the Gunners but now permitted the Germans. Again they complained, and 'to shut

them up' the Purser authorised the sale of a single tin of 50 cigarettes to each man.

Hopes of being home for Christmas were dashed when it was decided Iris should tow Moa back to Auckland. What with the trouble which ensued (a six-inch line parted and had to be replaced with a three-inch wire hawser), bad weather which slowed progress, Iris did not arrive until 26 December. This meant the search party had Christmas dinner at sea. Harry states the Germans were served roast lamb, roast potatoes, cabbage, spinach, and peaches. He makes no mention of what the Gunners got except '... it was not worth eating.'

Thus it was a rather disgruntled squad which arrived back in Auckland. However, the OC Search Party mollified them to some extent by promising to recommend them for 14 days' leave. Whether or not they received it Harry does not record.

Carl Singer, one of Moa's crew, injured shortly after von Luckner's capture was brought aboard Iris for medical attention, where he described Moa's capture. Von Luckner ordered the crew and their belongings into the forepeak '... and make the best of it.' Von Egidy, one of the escapers and a German Government official, wanted to throw them overboard but von Luckner overruled him. Later they were made to jettison two-thirds of Moa's cargo of sawn timber, and to stand watches at the wheel. Von Luckner intended to put them ashore on an island with a supply of provisions but was forestalled by his capture.

Von Luckner had a few complaints also. He stated he and his fellow-escapers on recapture were robbed of their personal possessions and treated like common criminals, the latter complaint prompted no doubt by their incarceration in Mt Eden Prison for three weeks before being returned to POW camps. To his critics he said, 'You left the door open so you can't blame me for walking out!

From the foregoing you will no doubt have concluded that security on Motuihe Island was pretty lax. As might be expected an enquiry was held into the circumstances of von Luckner's escape and the Camp Commandant court-martialled for allowing the escape of persons committed to his charge without reasonable excuse. He was found guilty and sentenced to be dismissed the service. See General Order 178/1918.

THE LIMBER GUNNER: In the days of the horse the limber was a two-wheeled vehicle interposed between the team and the gun carriage in order to give the combination flexibility, and therefore tactical mobility.

A box on the limber carried ready-use ammunition, tools, cleaning gear, carbines etc. While on the move two Gunners sat on the box; they were responsible for the limber and stores, for 'unlimbering' the gun when coming into action, and 'limbering up' when preparing to move. Hence they became known as 'Limber Gunners.'

With mechanisation the limber was eventually seen to be unnecessary but a conservative Regiment retained a pneumatic-tyred version for many years. For some peculiar reason they called it a 'trailer.'

With modern high-speed equipments riding on the trailer would be dangerous so the Limber Gunners moved into the towing vehicle with the rest. However, the title survived. A Limber Gunner is now one skilled in the basics of the Gunner trade, i.e. the care and maintenance of his equipment and its ammunition.