



# "The Messenger"



*(Of The Gods.)*

**Official Newsletter of the Royal Australian Signals Association (SA) Inc.**

**July 2007.**

**Disclaimer:** The views expressed in articles in the "Messenger" are those of the writers/contributors and not necessarily those of the "Committee" or "General Membership" of the Royal Australian Signal Association (SA) Inc.



**Snowy Marsh and David Matthews.** (See overleaf)

# Anzac Day 2007.

The usual sixty or so marched in our group this year and were led by Colonel Neville Bergin (Rtd). We were privileged to have with us "Snowy Marsh". Snowy is ninety one and half years old having served in WW2 and was a POW in Changi and Japan. Snowy was also a dispatch rider for Lionel Matthews GC. MC. and is pictured with Lionel Matthew's Son, David. Only a handful of our group attended the reunion at the Gilles Plains RSL. Let us hope for a better turnout next year.

## Reserve Forces Day.

Reserve Forces Day this year will be celebrated on Sunday 12<sup>th</sup> August. The activities will be in three stages.

- **The March** commencing at 1100Hrs (Form up at 1030Hrs). The FUP will be at the northern entrance to the Royal Adelaide Showgrounds and the route will be Greenhill Road and Anzac Highway entering into Keswick Barracks via the main gate for the parade. His Excellency Major General Michael Jeffery AC CVO MC (Retd) Governor-General of the Commonwealth of Australia will take the salute at the front of the Army Museum as units pass.
- **A Review** of the parade and an address by the Governor General with a Reserve Forces Tri-Service Guard of Honour.
- **A free barbecue** together with Unit, Association and recruiting displays.

Both the Governor General and Her Excellency, Mrs Marlena Jeffery will attend the BBQ luncheon and informally meet past and present Reservists, their families, friends and employers. Units and Associations can have displays in the immediate vicinity of the parade ground and attendees will be able to view vehicles and equipment. The BBQ is timed to commence around 1200Hrs.

This information is derived from communications with the Reserve Forces Day Council who wish participation from the members of our Association. To quote their words "**Hope you can support us this year**" and "**It would be good if the RASigs Association could attend in some force and also join the march and parade**".

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# Signals Reunion November 2008.

**A**s reported in the April Messenger the organization of this **national event** is progressing well, suitable venues and accommodation being currently under consideration. The dates are now virtually ironclad being centred around Corps Day and Remembrance Day.

<b>Friday</b> November: 7 <sup>th</sup>	Registration day.
<b>Saturday</b> 8 <sup>th</sup> :	Family Day.
<b>Sunday</b> 9 <sup>th</sup> :	Corps Day Parade.
<b>Monday</b> 10 <sup>th</sup> :	Dinner.
<b>Tuesday</b> 11 <sup>th</sup> :	Remembrance Day.

Go to the Association's website: [www.rasigs.com](http://www.rasigs.com) for further information and to register and or pay.

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## Military Superannuation benefits for retired personnel.

**M**any if not all of our members will be aware that currently retirement benefits for retired military personnel have been under review and besides the many communications to the relative ministers undertaken by a number of people the Australian Veterans and Defence Services Council Inc. (AVADSC) have made a lengthy submission to the Military Superannuation Review. The size, scope and complexity of this document (13 pages) prevents any detailed description in the "Messenger". Below is listed, in brief, some of the salient points presented in that submission which are mainly related to the justification for any future improvement in benefits a retiree may be entitled to.

- ❖ The relationship of retirement benefits to the desired recruitment and retention of personnel.
- ❖ Reasonable expectations of quality of life after retirement.
- ❖ The need for ready and accurate information.
- ❖ The comparison in benefits between military personnel and others in public service.
- ❖ The appropriateness and level of taxation.
- ❖ Adequacy of the scheme on its own merits without relying on taxation concessions.
- ❖ The restoration of retired pay to the pre-commutation level.
- ❖ Benefits adjusted annually to keep relativity with average weekly earnings.
- ❖ The special demands that military service places on military personnel as compared to civilian life.
- ❖ The unique skills required for military service are not relevant in the majority of civilian employments thus a retiree will not only retire early as compared to a civilian but will without costly and substantial training find meaningful employment difficult to obtain.
- ❖ The uniqueness of military life which involves liability for combat operations, a military discipline code and regimented way of life, long and irregular working hours, early retiring ages, high standards of continuing physical fitness plus frequent relocation and separation from family.

(Continued overleaf)

- ❖ Retirement occurs for defence personnel at a time when family financial burdens can be high in particular when their children have reached higher education and tertiary levels.
- ❖ The question of linking benefits to the CPI.
- ❖ The economic erosion of benefits.
- ❖ The defence force's contribution to the economic, strategic and diplomatic well being of Australia.
- ❖ Making allowance for the steady increase in the average life expectancy.

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**Vale:           41259 Brian Stevens Major Retired. VK5FV. 29.5.1931 – 4.4.2007**

**Brian Arthur Stevens** passed away suddenly at his home on the 4<sup>th</sup> April this year. He was 75 years of age. His funeral was conducted at Norwood on 11<sup>th</sup> April during which a very moving tribute to Brian's full life was presented by the members of his family.

Brian enlisted in the Australian Army in 1951 wishing to follow in his Father's footsteps and enter the Armoured Corps as a Tank driver. However he was told that Tank drivers as intelligent as he was weren't required and so found himself as a member of Signals. Thus began an active Military career seeing him serve in Korea, Japan, Vietnam and many postings throughout the Corps on the Australian mainland. Brian was a keen fisherman and loved the Murray River and took part in the "Wombat" cruises

Brian was a keen Amateur Radio operator "Ham" and had worked practically all the three hundred odd world entities. During the Corps 75<sup>th</sup> birthday celebrations in 2000 Brian came on board for the operation and organization of VI5RAS, an Amateur Radio special event station being part of the birthday celebrations. Not only did he do his share of operating but cheerfully undertook the considerable task of recording and collating the logs and issuing the 2500 acknowledgement cards to the stations worked. During the operating month he, Brian Melville and Bill McKeough drove to Melbourne constructing and operating the portable station at Watsonia Barracks.

Seeing or speaking to Brian would always result in an enthusiastic greeting being testimony to his kindness and happy disposition. He is survived by his widow Harumi, Peter, Dianne and David and five grand-children.

**Vale:   Clive Rudolph Fromm. 1919-2006.**

**I**t has come to the Association's notice that one of members Clive Rudolph Fromm passed away in May of last year. He was nearly 87 years of age. He is survived by his wife June, three children, stepdaughters, seven grandchildren and three Great grandchildren. It appears from the information at hand that Clive outlived his first wife and two of his children.

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## The Rumsby Report. (Continued from the April Messenger)

**I**t was generally accepted that European troops did become depressed and too often lost morale in circumstances the LRPG's would have to operate. The shameful behaviour of the Europeans when the Japs over-ran Malaya, Singapore and Burma, had bitten deep, very deep in fact and there were some obvious signs that things hadn't really improved.

There were half a dozen LRPG's each drawn from its parent battalion, three from various Gurkha regiments and the balance from either the Garwhali or Kumaoni Rifles. Ours came from the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 5<sup>th</sup> Royal Gurkha Rifles, the bulk from C Coy and included its OC Captain 'Flash Jack' Murray.

There were two rifle platoons, a small support section of mortars and medium machine guns, a few assault pioneers for any demolition work, sufficient clerical and stores personnel for unit administration and to establish a permanent base, a mule transport and veterinary section and Signals, in all about 100 ranks or slightly more. There was attached a small squad from the Assam Rifles for local knowledge and interpretation. The LRPG did not at first, during its reconnaissance role, operate as one entity, but was organized into several self-contained patrols that alternated in the field.

We drew heavily upon Wingate's experience, accepting the better attributes and eliminating the deficiencies. Sloan was always quick to acknowledge and praise the good side of things and people, even Wingate, just as he was as quick to castigate the bad.

Wingate's first expedition comprised of a brigade of three battalions, The Burma Rifles, The King's Regiment and the 3/2 Gurkhas. This was organised into eight columns, four principally British, four Gurkha with detachments of the Burma Rifles distributed between them. Each column had three rifle platoons, a recce platoon, a commando-engineer platoon, a support platoon and mule transport and so on. Although they operated in the same general area, each of these columns moved and acted independently. They were too small to fight and too big to run. Easy pickings for the Japs!

Our patrols consisted of three elements; the observation-survey group, wireless group and mule transport and could be fine tuned down to six or seven men. One factor made us enlarge it to twelve and that factor was sleep. The exhausting nature of marching through rough jungle country plus the psychological pressure of being constantly inside enemy territory meant that people must have rest. So two men, two hours sentry duty through the hours of darkness meant that a member would stand only one watch per night. This duty fell equally upon officer, NCO and man.

There were three vital elements necessary for the successful operation of the LRPG-airdrops, mule transport and wireless.

Air drops of supply were essential. Once we had crossed the Chindwin River, we were completely cut off from any physical contact with friendly forces. The daily rations were 2.5 lbs on the Indian scale. With bits and pieces it could be rounded up to 3 lbs for easy reckoning. The Indian ration, which we all ate on patrol, was 1 lb rice, half pound of biscuit, half a pound of tinned vegetables, quarter pound of meat, some dried fruit plus tea, sugar, curry powder and glucose. The Indian troops, including Gurkhas, had a weekly ration of 28 oz of meat. It was as much as they wanted for they were not great meat eaters. Hindus not eating beef, mutton or goat was the ticket.

We required tinned mutton from South Africa. The Indian Government set up an abattoir system in Durban so that the Muslim priests and Hindu Brahmins could slaughter in accordance with the customs and the beliefs of the troops. The processed tinned product bore the respective stamp of the particular religion. So instead of bully beef we got tinned mutton which wasn't too bad when curried. However, European officers got an extra couple of tins of meat per week, usually tinned sausages or bacon, which didn't offend the Hindu beef taboo. When the Britishers (I include myself here for simplicity) were on patrol it was easy, for an opened tin had to be consumed at once.

Ration drops were done up in 5 day lots. A five day drop for twelve men equalled 180 lb, plus, of course, the mule fodder-hay, unhusked rice, some oats, amounting to about 10lb per day per mule

providing that some grazing was available. Once over the river with a start point of 20 days rations, three days carried by a man and the balance on the mules, the aim was to keep a minimum of 10 days available, 15 days was always the aim, as aircraft could be weathered in for days at a time.

Rations were not all. Boots simply fell apart, clothing rotted of your back and medicines were necessary. We also needed cash at times, special money that was silver rupees, specially minted with Queen Victoria's head. Of course, I had signal requirements, distilled water for one-replacement wet cell batteries, sometimes a wireless set. The whole had to be air dropped and arrive in working order. The Staff Captains task was enormous!

Because of security, the wireless signal for ration drops was classified into A, B, C, etc. --- A for rations only, B for rations and boots, C rations, boots and clothing and so on. Extras had their own particular identification. Five days rations were simply A800 plus the map reference in code. Ten days was 2A800. The Jemadar-Quartermaster had every man's fittings, boots, hat, shirt belt- the lot and a roll of the personnel on each patrol. When a clothing drop was wanted, the correct clothing and boots were sent. As Gurkhas were somewhat different physically and wore very broad fitting boot, usually a five or six, no British officer could pick up a pair of boots or a jacket at random and hope to wear them.

We were a high priority unit and despite the general shortage of stores, there was always ample to meet needs. Of course if supply stopped, we stopped. We became inoperable and if Slim and the 14<sup>th</sup> Army wanted information, we simply had to be clothed and fed.

Glucose played a big part. This was one result of Wingate's 43 show. His men craved sugar and felt depressed and lost energy when there was no glucose sweets in the ration drop. This is all general knowledge now, but experience and common sense told us then that glucose was essential. Our staff captain had been a field soldier and saw to it that our patrols never went short. It may seem a bit odd to an Australian soldier, but as the Gurkhas had an entitlement of two to three ounces of rum per day, this was available.

Imagine for one moment, a twelve man patrol overlooking a Jap camp in the last light of day and a hundred miles from friends. Capes are shining and brims of the fur felt hats drooping from heavy monsoonal rain. The caped figures are sitting around, spooning up a meal cooked on petrol-soaked tins of dirt and one fellow is moving among them pouring out a finger or two of over-proof rum into tin pannikins. There is a light in the men's eyes, a wan smile and we sit holding the tin cup in both hands, slowly sipping the distilled sugar, the cup of kindness, a mouthful of optimism.

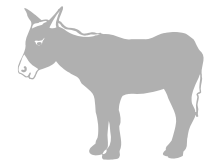
It may be thought by this, that we were carrying things a bit far and using up space and weight that could be more gainfully used. However, different men, different need and our troops always gave that which could be reasonably expected and more. So this could be seen as a small reward and a future investment.

A patrol would select an open piece of country, a maiden, signal the coded map reference, time and date and wait in hope. It was always a touchy business. Planes could be weathered in, the enemy active in the area and so on. Security was preserved in part by the Air force putting on a strike on some target which would carry them over the drop zone. The 'biscuit bomber' would break formation to come in low as we talked him in and ditch our ration drop. Fragile items were parachuted in cylinders which we would have to bury. The biscuit bomber would regain altitude and join the formation on its way to brass up some surprised Jap.

We would gather up the bits and pieces and high tail it out of the area at full speed, hopefully leaving no evidence behind. What a man does for a living!

Our air support flight could provide other services at a pinch. Using a Lysander Army Spotter Aircraft, they could pick up a sick man or deliver a fit one. Also if a patrol got into a corner it was possible to get a flight of thunderbirds to beat up the enemy and give us some cover. The Airforce, weather permitting never let us down. We were assigned a flight of Kiwis, RNZAF, from Air Transport Command and those boys could just about fly without aircraft.

**M**ule transport was indispensable. Sigs need two, one for the wireless station and its associated equipment, the other for the battery charging engine, fuel and spare batteries. Of course there was a need for ration mules as well. Animal handling skills were a requirement for all members of the LRPG from CO to bugler. All had to be interchangeable in many facets of military art. It was part of the game.



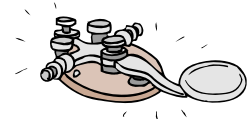
The mules, which were about 14 or 15 hands, were mainly bred in Argentina, as local remount and breeding establishments were naturally unable to cope with the demand. The mule needed to be 4 years old for packsaddle duty. They were tough and less liable to disease than horses. One is reluctant to comment with any air of authority on, although I had a close relationship for ten years, the relative qualities of mules as opposed to horses and ponies.

I was not a horseman or, beyond the chocolate box picture, a lover of horses. Therefore it is hard to make comparisons, but observation leads me to believe that the mule was a damn good and much maligned animal which responded to kindness as well or better than horses. One couldn't act the goat with them and took care to stay out of kicking range of the hind legs (they could kick sideways) but they were pretty well tractable if firmly but kindly handled.

The specialist animal handler, the muleteer, was spot on! A mule wouldn't move with an uneven load, so it was an education to watch them load up a beast. The load was balanced equally, almost to the ounce. It was commonsense, of course, and something that each had to learn and practice. The loads were contained in either a wicker pannier or canvass packs, distributed on either side or on top of the packsaddle itself. The saddlery, harness and leads were originally leather which picked up mould and fungus and transmitted skin disease to the animals, but fortunately much of it was replaced by webbing well padded were necessary. It caused problems of its own in the 'wet', but that was something we could get around.

The 1st class mule could carry a payload of 162 Lbs and the big light draught, ordnance mule, even more. (They were mainly used by the mountain artillery) However none were loaded to more than two thirds of this to keep them fit and able to work in the exhausting muggy heat and difficult going of mountain and swamp. The Indian Army must have used tens of thousands of them, a hundred thousand, perhaps, yet the Army was mainly mechanized, some divisions entirely so. The Burma campaign must have been a Quartermaster-General's nightmare!

**W**ireless was another essential element and of particular interest. It may be like carrying coals to Newcastle to recite the usual inhibiting factors which existed. They were, however, very close to the heart. The border strip between the Indian Frontier and the central highly developed plains of lower Burma, was wild and trackless jungle, much of it mountainous, 6000-7000 feet in the north and cut by wide river valleys. Patrols across the Chindwin were separated from the receiving station by these high ranges, although the method of propagation was sky-wave, they were a factor.



It was usual to make two 'Skeds' a day, one after dawn and the other in the late afternoon before the ionosphere closed down. Except in an emergency there were no night transmissions, certainly not during the monsoons. As the volume rose with the closure of the ionosphere, so did the noise level and the atmospheric s drowned out much of the signal.

At each sked, control gave a brief netting and tuning call which a patrol would answer with call sign and strengths. Control would return strength report with "Sit-Rep" (Situation Report) which may be of value to the patrol regarding enemy activity. The patrol would **not** answer. Unless there was information which was important to signal immediately, patrols stayed of the air except for AM and PM wireless strengths. A whole patrol may pass without raising a signal except for air drops. Security was the ticket during the reconnaissance period, for we were only filling in the map.

There were times, of course when something needed urgent reporting. This we knew would draw the crabs. The light traffic required as much operating skill as handling a heavy load, particularly at control, as those fellows had to be on their toes all the time for a frantic message that may never come.

The general set-up was this, and it applied pretty well to each of a half dozen LRPGs. They were raised under the umbrella of Special Operations but when deployed with the 14<sup>th</sup> Army, came under the operational command of the Director General of Operations 14<sup>th</sup> Army. The administrative Command was vested in a small HQ known as the 32<sup>nd</sup> Indian LRP Brigade and for Signals, the technical Command was with the Commander Signals 14<sup>th</sup> Army.

We received our documents, frequencies, NIS, call signs, address groups, Griddle, slidex, map codes and other encephalograms from the security Troop of 14<sup>th</sup> Army Sig. Regiment.

The chain of evacuation and repair of equipment was through a company of the 14<sup>th</sup> Army Signal Regiment appropriately sited to each LRPG. We had priority access to special project stores held by the 14<sup>th</sup> Army Signal Regiment.

Therefore each LRPG Signal Troop and its commander was quite independent and free from sudden swoops by superior Signal Officers to poke, pry and criticize, although we did have people come in from time to time to give advice and bring us up to date with signal matters.

The situation was further complicated by the fact that 'Control' was vested in a Special Wireless Troop equipped with heavy high-powered wireless and manned by high speed operators. This troop, which was part of the 14<sup>th</sup> Army Signal Regiment, was at the complete disposal of the Director General of Operations.

The system worked well enough, despite the seemingly fragmented areas of authority, because the overriding powers of the Director General, through operational Command, transcended all!

The wireless equipment that we received was the very best of field wireless available at the time. It was the wireless Station A62, which had been developed for, and was standard issue to, British Airborne divisions and first came into operational use with the French Resistance to whom it was parachuted. Once production was equal to the task, it came to the Far East as the standard divisional wireless for the 1<sup>st</sup> Indian Airborne Division and special operations troops.

The A62 Wireless Station was light, the transceiver weighed 30 pounds, encased in a tough duralium case which was tropic proof and hermetically sealed. It could stand immersion and would float and help support a man. It could be man-packed, with a second person man packing the 12 volt battery, animal packed, vehicle mounted and used as either a ground station or truck station. It was tough enough to withstand a parachuted air drop.

The A62 had an internal motor which developed 325 volts and its secondary source of power was the 12 volt wet cell battery. It had a reputed 25-50 mile range on voice and 50-150 mile on CW (Morse). This depended a great deal on the aerial propagating and the terrain. There were two frequency bands 1.6 to 4 Mhz and 4 to 10 Mhz. However the upper frequencies in the higher band had a tendency to 'drift'.

The dial face was very simple. The set was easily set up, it was easy to teach and easy to use. It was (very roughly) 10 inches by 15 inches and 10 inches deep. It could work, according to requirement, off a whip, mast or vertical aerial and horizontal wire.

The accompanying battery charging generator was a Chorehorse type light or as light as one could hope, very simple and quite rugged. It was the battery charger that gave us great problems. It was effective enough, but it was noisy. Various mufflers, suppressors and silencers were employed to quieten the sound. They worked well enough in a static camp, but in the buffeting of field service, were less effective than one might hope. It was obvious, when one was directly concerned, that the 'put put putting' of the battery charger in the quiet of the night, in the middle of enemy territory, that the safety of the patrol was at risk, not to mention the state of the underpants.

A quick and efficient replacement wireless station was available from Australia as it turned out. The TBX8 hand generated station was designed by Traeger, of Inland Mission fame, for military use. The bulk was produced by AWA under licence, for the Amphibious American Forces and, to a lesser extent, Australian Forces.

The TBX8 was in three components, The transmitter, the receiver and the hand generator. Together these weighed considerably more than the A62 and required three men to man-pack, but were a light mule load. Each part could be packed into an inflatable envelope which would, reputedly, support a swimming man. They were standard equipment for the Naval Bombardment Signals, used by Artillery Signals in Australian Forces, so I am told.

The frequency range was 1.5 to 5 Mhz (From memory) and the output was 8 watts on morse. That approximated the A62 output. The generator was strapped to a holdfast, such as a tree, by a metal chain and after a protracted transmission, the chain used to cut deeply into the tree. The signalman winding the pedals of the generator undertook hard laborious work. I know, having done several stints on the generator in my day. There was dry cell power which was used for reception only. We were badly in need of a high power dry cell battery wireless station. This came into use later during the Malayan Emergency. The A510 was an Australian invention, with the receiver carried in a basic pouch and the transmitter in another. It was wholly powered by dry cell batteries. The output was similar to the A62 and could be used by regimental signals and division signals and had several set frequencies from middle and high frequencies up to VHF.

Where the hell, one may ask, has our great wireless industry and potential gone? To the multi-Nationals, who owe no allegiance to any flag! Damn it!

**A**erials, the old antenna, loomed large in our thinking. Sky wave, reflecting the signal from the ionosphere, was the only means, therefore we used horizontal aerials of various types, the 'L', the end-fed, the dipole and the Shirley.



The Shirley was undoubtedly the best, provided one had time. It took time, space and man power to construct but by constant repetition and continuous training, there was a fairly slick drill perfected which meant that we could erect and collapse the Shirley in the Ringling Circus fashion.

It was originally developed to obviate skip distance. The ground and space-wave which automatically is propagated by a horizontal aerial, is quickly absorbed, scattered and diffused by the heavy vegetation and landforms of the tropics, so that the distances between the line of sight and the returning, reflected signal is considerably lengthened. The Shirley angles the signal very sharply at the ionosphere so that it bounces back almost at one's feet. This is excellent in the short distance wireless communications in mountainous country and was developed for use in New Guinea.

However, there was another very important effect. The angles and number of angles at which the aerials fired the signals at the ionosphere, meant that there was a number of long hops, which meshed in with other reflected signals, with the net result that the Shirley also gave off very reliable long-range signals.

It is more complicated than that, but not being a very technical man, I can't go into it at any great depth without losing myself. The general idea is there and as an old operator, you can work it out for yourself.

We later used a 'folded dipole' which had an great tolerance to frequency changes without losing the quality of the signal. However, this was complicated and only used in semi-permanent situations which didn't arise in the purely recce period.

My signal troop (I like to think of it as my troop), was shaped and moulded in its final training according to my wishes and it had a working speed of about 20 groups per minute. A reasonable working speed, but because the control operators were all high-speed specialists of greater capacity, they were a little impatient at our more pedestrian pace. Now, the very basic rule implanted in my mind as an operator, was that you don't send faster than you can receive. If you do, it is a wasted transmission.

We were very much aware of the high quality of the Japanese interception and direction finding signal services. On the odd occasions when our patrols had to transmit very urgent information to the 14<sup>th</sup> Army, we found that to often our operators were forced to repeat the message, often on "Words Twice" procedure. This was not good enough!

It meant that our patrol wireless had to stay 'on air' for several minutes instead of seconds. The whole thing rankled me. There were two or three occasions on one of my patrols that were simply inexcusable. I boiled! My very life was at stake, as was the whole patrol. Fortunately the CO Major Sloan, led those patrols (I lived in his pocket) and was well aware of the problem and its implications.

**O**nce back in our own base camp and recuperated from the labours of the whole thing, Sloan had to make a personal report to the Director General, Operations. The request was made and approved for me to accompany him to 14<sup>th</sup> Army for the purpose of putting our case clearly to the OC and personally to the operators of the Special Wireless Group.



I got nowhere! The toffy-nosed captain commanding the troop didn't want to know some up-start subaltern from some scruffy unit. I tried everything that I knew, but there was no going past the cultured indifference of this fellow. So, in a very foul mood, I left to report to Major Sloan in the vicinity of Director General Operations area.

"Scrubbed me off like a dirty arse, Sir!" I told him.

"Very fitting, old son!", he said "but not final. No not final at all!"

Sloan took me with him to the DG Ops basher and told me to wait. Presently he put his head out, "Come here, old boy!" and beckoned me in. "Now, tell the Brigadier why you wished to speak to the Special Wireless people". Once I had settled down a little and collected my thoughts, I told the DG the burden of my complaint. I restrained myself, because I was somewhat overawed by addressing the officer who held more power than any other in the 14<sup>th</sup> Army HQ, except perhaps, General Slim, But I was angry and the anger showed through.

"I see and accept your point, Mr. -er -er."

"Rumsby!" said Sloan.

Just so! I see your point and something must be done."

He swung his eye from me to Sloan. "Percy, I think your way of handling this is best. Half an hour ago, I would have thought that you were raving. I'll arrange it all. You, you bloody Demon Major, are a cunning old swine!" They exchanged grins.

"Thanks, Jim", said Sloan. As I said, it's not what you know, but who!

When we went to Special Wireless in the early afternoon, I was carrying a large pack, following my revered and beloved commander who was striding along, unencumbered. Sloan had made a point of putting up all of his ribbons.

We were greeted by my poncey captain and his two subalterns and conducted to the men's mess hut. The mess was a small-elongated room, open on the sides and enclosed by insect wire. At one end and on one side were screen doors, at the other the servery from the kitchen. There were about four small tables, enough to seat 16 to 20 men. Special wireless was a small detachment.

The off duty operators were seated facing the servery, looking either bored or apprehensive, thinking "Oh Lord! Here it comes again, another bawling out!" There was the common look of tiredness, ill health and strain about them. There was little appreciation of the hard work the Sigs did, even by their own officers. It was more usual for outsiders to look upon their tasks as being "cushy". It was an attitude that didn't help morale. There could be no excuse for inefficiency or slackness, indeed that was purpose of our visit, but a little encouragement, a show of support could work wonders.

"Good afternoon, chaps. My Sig. O. and I have come to meet and express our appreciation of your skills and technical excellence in handling our wireless traffic". Heads began to lift and some faces showed surprise at the lines of the address. "You see we have every reason to know and be thankful for your good

work". Sloan gave a dramatic pause. "You see, our very lives depend upon you doing your job!" He had their full attention now.

"Perhaps you don't know from whence our signals come". Sloan the old play actor lowered his voice in a confidential tone, he knew that they had not been told by their officers. "Those signals are ours and those that came this morning" (He read out the call signs and frequencies of our active patrols) were from inside enemy-held territory. We all know that the Jap has a very good interception and directional finding service and so far we have beaten them. This only because we can get on the air and get off quickly, and that is the result of not having to repeat signals or give words twice, because, in the long haul, you fellows are on the job and on your toes".

Sloan gave a little chuckle. "it is hard enough on the old underpants when one is in sight and sometimes the smell of the Japs, without having to worry about his D.F. It is a great comfort to us to know that we have you doing your excellent best".

They had not been spoken to in that way before. Things were usually taken for granted unless they went wrong. It seemed to me that Sloan had taken the right approach. It was a matter of psychology, of course. Nagging complaint brought resentment and would not achieve our aim. This was different for they were treated as responsible adults and people of value, which helped the old ego. At the same time, the very things that Sloan wanted hammered home, were!

They would quickly forget the Sar' Major like blasts and pleas to do better, but the praise would linger. Besides, they had been taken into a senior and highly decorated officer's confidence. Sloan was not content to leave it quite like that. While chatting with the sigs informally, he whispered to me to bring in the boys.

Our truck was outside with Sloan's orderly, rifleman and one of my sigs. Aboard were two dozen bottlers of lolly water for the Special Wireless boys. I asked the rifleman to bring them in. When I returned to the mess, Sloan was saying "Now, my chaps would like to you to know that they really do appreciate your efficiency and have asked me to give these as a mark of their appreciation".

I unbuckled the pack which contained bags of sweets and packets of cigarettes. The sweets came out of 'Comfort Issue' packs and the cigarette packets out of Class A ration packs and the bottles of lolly water out of Sloan's pocket.

"There are some fellows on duty" said Sloan and began to make a small pile at the far end of the table. In *sotto voce* said, "Now who is it? Ah yes! Sgt. Brown, Cpl. Black Sig. White Sig. Grey and", raising his voice "Sig. Blue is sick? In hospital?" They obviously weren't the fellows names but he had memorized the duty roster to confound the assembly. They were duly surprised, more so when he said to the nearest fellow, "Ah, Sig Harris, would you be so kind as to pass these around!" Consternation! I had mentioned earlier that he was a cunning old fox.

Rifleman Jitabahdu and my signalman entered at this point, carrying the bottles of lolly water. "Ah! Chaps! Here is one of your phantom operators, Signalman Huzzunduh, a Gurung Gurka. Huzzundah was on the air to you, from inside the Jap lines up until a week ago and will be back there again with us very shortly".

The signalman was introduced to the Special Wireless Section operators. He was cheery, embarrassed and very much Gurkha! "How many words have you got , Johnny?", someone asked. "Twenty two and a half, by golly. I hope soon to gain Twenty seven and a half and receive the higher

specialist pay like top operators like you”. Sig. Huzzundah spoke in that Welsh-like Indian accent but with a choice of words that may have been outside our British Sigs, vocabulary.

The material gifts of sweets, smokes and lolly water may underline Sloan’s purpose, but the sudden presentation of a highly articulate and well spoken Gurkha, who had some very obvious technical ability in the sigs, very own field, rammed home the point that could not be ignored by even the thick headed officers.

Suddenly Sloan said, “Well, we have a long drive and must be off. Goodbye chaps, good luck and we’ll hear you on the ether.

It was bright sunshine outside, but purple-black clouds were edging up over the hills behind blinding white cumulus thunderheads, which climbed thousands of feet into the blue. Faint continuous flickers lit the black clouds and one sensed, if not heard, the on-going growl of thunder. The harsh light flooded the Imphal plain, shining up the fleshy blue-green jungle from which wafted the foetid smell of damp and decaying vegetation. Among this vegetated odour came whiffs of sickly sweet putridity from uncollected and unburied dead of the great battle that here broke the flower of the Japanese Army.

“This will drown out wireless comms within two hours”, I said. “We’ll get drenched driving home”, Sloan said. “The visitors mess is open and you owe your beloved CO a drink-several drink, in fact. Give the lads a few rupees, the NAAFI ‘Wet’ is open too!”

I was extremely fortunate to have been sent to this troop on first appointment. The great stroke of luck was that it was independent, which allowed one to make adjustments at one’s own pace to feel one’s way. Outside the LRPG, there were no quizzing superior officers to descend out of the blue. I was able to make and correct my mistakes in my own way and impose something of my personality on the troop.

This independence was relative and existed within a well-defined perimeter. However, without it, my career may have taken a different and less congenial course. This was well supported by three vital factors; the troop, its men and the unit commander.

The troop was small, simple and intimate. There were a handful of wireless detachments, a technical maintenance detachment and a small supervising and administrative staff. The troop strength was roughly 20 who, with one notable exception, were drawn wholly from the 5<sup>th</sup> Royal Gurkha Signals platoons. Most came from the 2/5<sup>th</sup> Sig. platoon and the half dozen others from the 3/5<sup>th</sup>. We carried our own first line reinforcements at the double the ‘intensive rate’.

Because 14 or 15 personnel were drawn directly from the 2/5<sup>th</sup> and the balance from the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, it was a well integrated family of familiar friends long before I caught up with it. I was the only stranger, the only nigger in the woodpile.

Every British Officer sent to a Gurkha unit had to prove his worthiness, he had to win his spurs! This involved a period of probation, not with the CO, but with the troops, the Gurkhas. I understand that in regular Gurkha battalions as opposed to those enlisted for the ‘War only’, failure to gain the confidence of the Gurkhas, ended many an otherwise promising career.

**(To be continued next issue)**

# Annual Dinner 2007.

**M**embers are reminded that this year's annual dinner is planned to occur during the Corps Day weekend, that is Saturday evening 10<sup>th</sup> November. Most details will be available by the September issue of the "Messenger" and invitations will be dispatched in due course.

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## The Kokoda Track



**B**eginning in the next issue of the "Messenger" will be the first part of an article by one of our members, John Richards-Pew who allows us a fascinating insight into his recent trek along the Kokoda Track.

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