



# "The Messenger"



*(Of The Gods.)*

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

**October 2007.**

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**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.

## **PRESIDENTS REPORT**

Dear Members,

I hope that this message finds you all well. The Association has of late made more inroads with 144 Sig Sqn and have been allocated our own room in the Squadron. The committee has already begun fixing the room up with memorabilia that Jim Erwin's family have returned to the association as well as items we already had. The refurbishing of the room at 144 Sig Sqn will take some time but it is good to have an area that we can call our own. We were recently invited by the OC of 144 Sig Sqn to present the Association's purpose to its members. This went over well and I now believe the unit has a better idea on what we do.

The Association have been very busy as a committee with the organisation of the RASigs Reunion 2008 here in Adelaide. The subcommittee for the Reunion has worked very hard, in doing so they have put in place a great structure for the upcoming Reunion in 2008. I would ask all our members to throw your support into this event, please. You can help most by getting in contact with old mates and friends who might enjoy a visit to Adelaide as well as participating in the Reunion. The dates are 7<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup> November 2008. Our website [www.rasigs.com](http://www.rasigs.com) has all the information that you need at this stage. If you need help in finding some old mates please go to the associations our website [www.rasigs.com](http://www.rasigs.com) and send an email with the details of the person you wish to contact and we will do our best for you.

**The Annual Corps Dinner is coming up soon, Saturday 10<sup>th</sup> November 2007 at the Gillies Plains RSL.** Please try to make the time to attend the function, we have had a great night for the last few years and we would really appreciate the support of our members and friends where possible.

I hope to see you all at the Annual Dinner in November, take care.

Bruce Long: President RASIG ASSN.

## Vale:

### Ivy Teresa (Tess) Erwin.

Recently the Association received the sad news of the passing of Tess Erwin on August 18<sup>th</sup> this year. Tess was the widow of Jim Erwin, a well remembered stalwart of our Association and the general Signals community. Tess was only 64 years old surviving Jim by just over twelve months. Tess survived one battle with cancer but was recently afflicted again. She is survived by her four children, three grandchildren and a number of brothers and sisters.

### Paul Reeve:

Passed away in the first week of August last. No other information is available at this time.

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To Alan Comely, Rod Phillips and Mike Thomason (San Diego) who have recently joined the Association.

## *RASIGS Reunion 2008.*

**A**s reported in the April and July Messengers the organization of this **national event** is progressing the dates and venues being now confirmed appear below.

**Friday November: 7<sup>th</sup> :**

**Saturday 8<sup>th</sup> :**

**Sunday 9<sup>th</sup> :**

**Monday 10<sup>th</sup> :**

**Tuesday 11<sup>th</sup> :**

Registration day at Keswick Barracks

Family Day/Barbecue at Bonython Park.

Corps Day Parade at Keswick Barracks.

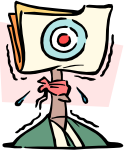
The Corps Dinner at the Entertainment Centre.

Remembrance Day at Keswick Barracks.

The Entertainment Centre is capable of catering for many hundreds of people so one can appreciate the potential scope of what is planned. The Remembrance Day Ceremony on Tuesday 11<sup>th</sup> will be held at our memorial in Keswick Barracks, the Association currently undergoing a project to beautify the area. Go to the Association's website: [www.rasigs.com](http://www.rasigs.com) for further information.

## **Annual Dinner 2007.**

**A**s mentioned in the Presidents report this year's annual dinner is to occur on Saturday evening 10<sup>th</sup> November during the Corps Day weekend. The venue is the Gilles Plains and Hampstead RSL clubrooms. **An Invitation, attachment and a response slip accompany this issue.** Members and friends of the Association are urged to consider attending and help to bolster our numbers.



**The Editor is to blame: Apologies to John whose surname, in the last issue of the “Messenger”, was erroneously shown as Richards-Pew instead of Richards-Pugh.**



## The Kokoda Track.

(An article submitted by John Richards-Pugh).

**The following diatribe relates to a “walk in a park” or a “walk down memory lane” however, not just any “park” or any “memory lane” - destination Kokoda.**

**Kokoda** can be best described in four words; Courage, Endurance, Mateship and Sacrifice.

**Kokoda** is an enigma in Australian military history – it ranks with Gallipoli and Tobruk

**Kokoda** “the bloody track” is 94 kms in distance – it has been likened to walking from sea level to Mt. Kosciusko and return two and half times; its relentless, its monotonous, its “in your face”, but asked whether I would do it again, the emphatic answer would be YES!!!

**A**sked why I wanted to “do” Kokoda and my initial reaction was undoubtedly, for all the wrong reasons, primarily, it was to see whether I was “fit”!!! But whilst doing the trek and since, my response has changed dramatically. I have learnt that one of my wife’s uncles served in Rabual with the 2/22<sup>nd</sup> and I have been reminded of what warfare is all about.

“Warfare” is a curious human phenomenon. It evokes an incredible range of complicated human character traits and emotions. The most obvious of these characteristics are hatred, extreme violence, fortitude, courage, pain and very often, a scant regard for the value of human life. Paradoxically, it also calls forth compassion and self-sacrifice and, indeed, the soldier’s love for his fellowman.

Perhaps the most famous and legendary Australian story of such compassion and self-sacrifice is embodied in the Gallipoli episode of “Simpson and his donkey” – however, having said that the men who fought and died on the Kokoda Track displayed all these particular traits and more.

**M**y little “adventure” started on Sunday 1<sup>st</sup> October, 2006 from Port Moresby. I had “hitched” a walk with two other Australians, Colin and Adam Love (father and son) from Maitland in New South Wales and a seven man “support” group consisting of Guide – Tarina, three food porters, another three porters of which Grayford was allocated to carry some of my camping equipment.



**D**awn “dawned” too early – woke at approximately 4.15 am – endeavoured to go back to sleep but without success. Got up and repacked the gear for the “umpteenth” time – still not “down” to a manageable size so hope that Grayford is fit!!.

The “condemned” ate a hearty breakfast – continental - cereal, yoghurt, fruit, coffee and toast. Met other members of the group and waited till approximately 0900 before heading to the airport, for weighing of both gear and person.

Flight left at approximately 0930 for Kokoda – a twenty minute journey. Weather conditions good with clear skies though upon our approach to the mountain range large cumulus clouds were evident. Landed at Kokoda, to be met by what appeared “the whole village”. Kokoda was in 1942 a “sleepy little village” with a few native huts an administrative outpost and strategically one of the few places with a



landing strip. Things have changed little since – more native huts, a general store, hospital and administrative office. Upon arrival met a tour guide who escorted us to the Memorial Museum. A moving and humbling experience. Difficult to pen one’s thoughts adequately in relation to Kokoda. A small village steeped in Australian folklore and historically significant as Gallipoli.

From there we were taken by ute to “Rusty’s place (tour operator – Kokoda Trekking) – a “hotch potch” of native huts and houses set within a jungle setting. Here for the rest of day one – cannot be too bad!! Colin and Adam went swimming in local creek, looked inviting but..... Lunch and prepared tents for night and wrote up my diary – now that’s a first. The shock being too much that I retired for an afternoon siesta!!!

**F**eelings - initially upon sighting the Owen Stanley Ranges from the air – one of trepidation and yes – “What the hell am I doing here”!!

Hopeful that the weather remains as is –(hot and humid – and no rain) – informed that for the past fortnight it has not rained, so here’s hoping!!!

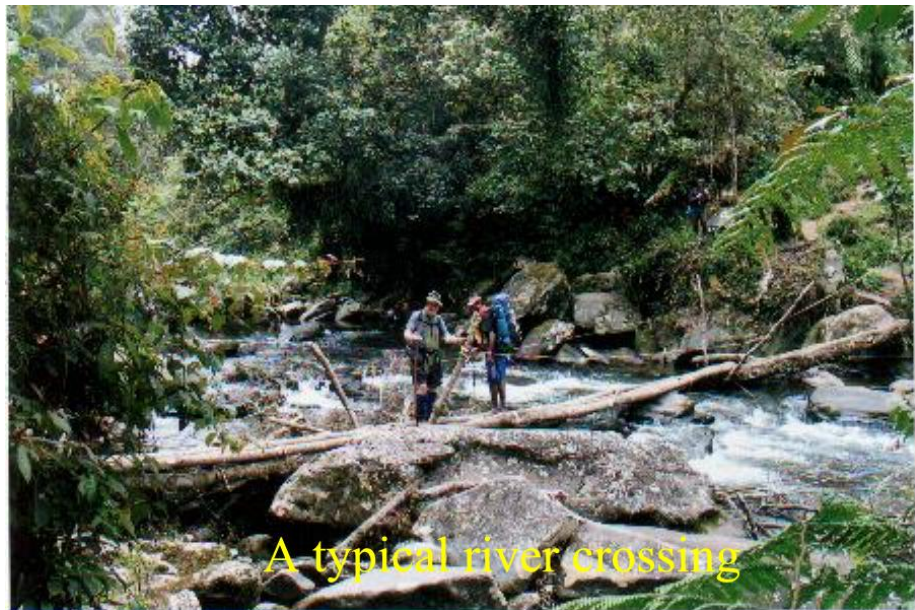
The humidity together with the terrain pose the major stumbling block but as long as I can “calm” walk – “smell the roses” (which do not appear to flourish “here in these parts”) and take things easy, one can hope for a satisfactory outcome.

This evening the Rugby League final between Melbourne Storm and the Brisbane Broncos is to be shown live from Sydney, so no doubt the “local boys” who are avid league followers will have a “field day”.

Advised by the guide that we “break” camp at approx 0600 tomorrow, in order that we can “get some walking done” before the heat of the day. Apparently six hours hiking tomorrow so “watch out” for the next exciting episode.

**“Next exciting episode”** – fateful words – not unlike the statement that the Titanic was unsinkable. Dawn came with its cacophony of sounds – “bleating” sheep - no not really!!! Roosters, assorted birds and wailing of a young child needing to be fed. Breakfast and away by 06.30 – a steady pace for a planned 5 hour hike – for me it was definitely longer!!! But that is another story. I should preface my remarks that whilst there is a written diary of what transpired throughout the trek, there is one that is in my head which may at some point be divulged. I have been or should I say had been endeavouring to come up with a “catchy” title for the forthcoming best seller (who knows a film maybe!!) and whilst contemplating such title it came to me – no not like St. Peter on the road to Damascus but in an event that happened shortly thereafter.

We had been walking/hiking for approx two and half hours and had successfully negotiated a number of streams/creeks/river crossings without too much water lining the bottom of our boots when we came across yet another crossing. The porter successfully navigated his way through the “roaring torrent” and I somewhat timidly endeavoured to emulate his feat. I was half way across



when – yes, you guessed it – one of the rocks was not at all stable – gave way and I made some attempt to “walk water” as well as “jump puddles” – needless to say – not successful by far – compound fracture to the fourth right finger and a “nasty” gash to the forehead and severe bruising of my left elbow – have always had a suspect bowling action!!!

I was dragged out of the creek somewhat “dishevelled” and feeling miserable!!. Colin administered first aid as best as could be expected under the prevailing conditions and it was suggested by the guide that I should return to Kokoda and seek treatment at the hospital which was some 1 hour down the track. Hopefully the doctor would be in residence!!! After approx 45 minutes and a few short cuts we arrived at the hospital, shown to the outpatients and duly attended to. (I should add that the quality of service was outstanding given the conditions in which the Staff have to work). The head laceration required three stitches after a local anaesthetic had been administered – then the finger was attended to – again local anaesthetic numbed it quite adequately and then “pulled and pushed” the bone back, stitched up the skin and checked the left elbow which was by now quite swollen. No broken bones!! The only real pain and embarrassment was when the doctor “stuck” a penicillin needle in “the you know where!!!”. After probably an hour at the hospital (which was neat and tidy – thanks to Australian Rotarians having recently painted the inside and outside of the buildings) I, along with Grayford headed off to catch up with the rest of the party. My head hurt, my finger hurt and my “pride had been dented”.

As an aside, one of my work colleagues, Gina Tronollone, was anxious for my wellbeing prior to “this Old Aged Pensioner” going on the trip – and had suggested that something like this or worse, would befall me during the hike – well Gina you were right and whilst you are justifiable in saying so, I know that it is not in your character!!!

No doubt by now you are wondering as to the “eye-catching” title for the next Dan Brown thriller – “I can jump puddles – Kokoda style” or “Yes Gina, you were right!!!”.

After a “gut wrenching” slog of some 5 hours – pretty solid bar the last hour when I was or felt “knackered”, we finally arrived at Isurava for the night only to be informed by the guide that Col and Adam “had gone ahead” to the battle site and would meet me there (3/10) given that I felt well enough to continue. Only rest would tell. Whilst I prepared tea my “man servant” erected the tent and saw to the various chores.

Again, an aside – one could not complain about the meals provided. Main course that night consisted of freeze dried roast – add water and stir, sweets – peached /pears coffee/tea, biscuits – high energy food. No need to have worried about bringing all the gear from Australia. Needless to say a percentage goes to the porters as one cannot eat it all – not that the porters look undernourished.

Went to bed at approximately 1900 hours to sleep “the sleep of the wounded”!!

**3/10**

**A**t approximately 0430 the peace was shattered by a rooster crowing which seemed to persist until I got up – 0500. Got changed, with difficulty, packed the gear and had breakfast – consisting of Top Taste sultana cake and coffee – wasn’t feeling particularly hungry – but needed something “eatwise” for the malaria tablet which I have been taking religiously.

After a reasonable nights rest I felt able to face the next challenge. Seven and half hours of a “little bit up and a little bit down” – familiar words to a hitchhiker from another galaxy!!! Started with enthusiasm and reached the battle site where we met up with Col and Adam and the rest of the “contingent”. I have failed to mention the “job descriptions” of the porters - Grayford and his two other colleagues are responsible of assisting the walkers (in just about everything) are really great and are no doubt the modern equivalent of their forebears – the “fuzzy wuzzy angels”. The food porters and apprentice’s fundamental job is from what I can gather – is to hand out the daily rations (feels like at least 2-3 kgs), normally the night before and a few camp duties.

From there, after having viewed the magnificent memorial to the fallen, and paid our respects, we headed ever “upward and downward” over “hill and dale” for the next two hours before reaching a small native village where we “broke” for lunch (half an hour) and then headed to Eora Creek, one of the major Australian battle sites during the Kokoda theatre of war. Reached Eora Creek at approx 14.30 and therefore had the rest of the afternoon to enjoy. Col and Adam went swimming whilst I sat as “life guard!!” – given that my “injuries” preclude me from swimming though I did “dangle my feet”. Thankfully and “touch wood” no blisters – weather – yesterday and today has been good – warmish but a cooling breeze - particularly to counter the heat and humidity. The track in places is “somewhat muddy” to be polite, though one hopes it does not get any worse for the succeeding days. Hiking today was good – finger and head not causing a great deal of bother.



Have been informed by the guide that tomorrow's jaunt is approximately 5 hours duration and the following day seven and half hours, so we are really looking forward to that!!!

Surprisingly it is getting dark around 18.30 hrs each night and as there is very little to entertain us we have been "hitting the sack early".

Another aside, whilst I think of it – we hear the calls of the myriad of birds that live in this region but have only spotted one. However, butterflies abound – spectacular colours of purple, blue, white, yellow and an assortment of "in between". Makes the walk that little more enjoyable. This walk is for those who need their "head's read". Reminds me of my initial conversation with our family doctor, who when I suggested that I was planning to do this hike, retorted "You cannot be serious!!" followed by "I'll have you certified"!!!. It is "full on" every step of the way, but having said that I hope to be one that finishes it!!

This is a pilgrimage of a different kind – unlike say the Camino de Santiago – a religious pilgrimage, this is one in which due respect is given to those gallant Australians who fought and died so that we can experience the freedom we hopefully, so much cherish.

Another aside, and in accord with "due instructions",

Yes Gina – "I have been smelling the roses"

Yes – "I have been calm walking" (An in-joke - whilst walking in Spain earlier in the year, the tour guide suggested that I needed to learn how to walk more slowly and not in typical Aussie fashion to be the first to reach our daily destination!!! had to uphold the tradition – could not allow a Kiwi or worse a Pom to beat us!!!)

Yes – I am taking care – especially after yesterday!!!

**4/10**

**05.30 and "up and at em!!"** – Slept relatively well given that Niagra Falls was within 100 yards of the hut!!. Whilst the sound of water can be pleasing to the ear (soothing etc.) it was not particularly conducive to sleeping. On the road by 06.30 for a five hour trek. Today's hike whilst not particularly technical was as always relentless, relentless, relentless. Up, up, up and then down, down, down with regular monotony. Walking down hills is difficult given the terrain and the path conditions. Thankfully, the weather has been good and whilst it (the path) is wet, muddy and slippery in parts, one continually needs to take particular care as to where one puts one's feet – tree roots, rocks, logs etc abound. One spends most of the time looking at one's boots ensuring you are walking on "safe" ground. As noted, tree roots and rocks cause general mayhem – if one is not vigilant - broken ankles, legs, wrists, arms etc – not a pleasant thought – worse than "jumping puddles"!!!

Reached Templeton's Crossing at approximately 11.00 and visited a small museum and cemetery. The museum consisted of various "live" pieces of ammunition, grenades, mortars, 303 rounds and a few other "bits and pieces". The cemetery was neat and orderly and some 40 odd posts representing unknown Australians killed in the vicinity of Templeton's Crossing. From there we headed to Templeton No. 1 where we encamped for the night. Tomorrow, nine and half hour trek (surprise surprise – we were of the believe that it was only going to be seven and half hour but then what is another two hours between friends!!!) – should prove interesting.

We have just experienced our first "drops of rain" and we are all hoping that it does not persist. It would appear that the "boys" have decided that tea (as in dinner) will be served at 16.00 hours – so an early night to listen to my MP3 (which incidentally I did last night – the first time since I have been away – classic jazz – well jazz that I like. Col thoughtfully redressed the head wound and it appears to be in order though there will be a scar – "war wound!!"

Tomorrow we go to Myola where the Yanks endeavoured to drop supplies – “biscuit runs” in DC3s – with little real success. Either the supplies fell short - in the jungle, or were somewhat “mangled” when “they hit the deck”.

An aside – to my wife – Barb, I believe that whilst this is a “blokey” trek, you would hold your own. It is relentless, but your “new found” walking skills of “keep on keeping on” would see you through. Have spotted a number of “birds” no, not the feathered variety, on other hiking tours which we pass periodically through the day and they seem to be keeping pace (as to whether they are enjoying it is academic!!!)

Unfortunately, as I write this passage, the heavens have opened up (1700 hours) and it looks like a wet night!! So it may be an early night in any case. Good God, if I went to bed at 18.00 hours (at home) the bed would collapse.

Well who would have believed it – in bed before six!!! Have put on the ‘long Johns’ as the “boys” believe that it is going to be a cold night. The hut does actually have a fireplace of sorts positioned in the middle of the hut, but we are somewhat reluctant to “fire it up’ just in case we burn the hut down.

It is a pity that I did not think to take a Dictaphone away with me and record my thoughts on the way rather than endeavour to recall them at day’s end. Would no doubt have made interesting listening. Well will “sign off “ till tomorrow - the track will be “lightening fast” and great care will need to be taken walking both “up hill and down dale”.

----- Part 2 (Final) in the next issue.

## The Rumsby Report.

(Continued)

The decision to raise our particular L RPG was taken by mid-1943 and selected sigs were sent to undertake an advanced wireless course at the signal school at Bareilly. They were there in late November, when I arrived in India and was sent up from Delhi, on the very day that I arrived, to carry out post course training. They were held within the Regimental Signal Wing of the school where I took up Quarters.

They were all well trained, and to my surprise, as they had undergone a five or six months course, still of sound mind. The course which they had undertaken, was profound and eased my task considerably.

It may well be that at this point, I acknowledge the efficiency and capacity of the British Officer in general and the British Officers of the Indian Army in particular. I feel that a somewhat caustic opinion of their attitude, aptitude and intellectual and moral capacity to do the right thing, may show through in this. Unfortunately they had more than a fair share of deadbeats amongst them, they had brilliant men too, gifted and gallant officers who would be a bonus in any army. However, as we see in life, a few ‘wrong-uns’ discredit the great bulk. The old rotten apple!

The troop was composed entirely of regulars. Men of long and honourable service, at least two-thirds had ten or more years up and none less than five years. All had considerable service in the battalion sigs, which meant that they were competent in the basic trades. This broad familiarity with the field cable, dispatch riding and a wide variety of operating skills provided a very solid base upon which to transform them from competent jacks of all trades into highly skilled specialists.

The wireless operator course provided for morse speed, procedure, clerical, equipment familiarity, general theory, practical aerials and battery charging and maintenance of the charging generator. My task was to maintain the established skills and increase, if possible, the morse speed which then stood at about 20

G.P.M. It was necessary to sort out the personnel into the required organization and to turn it into the tactical weapon that would be required in the field

The men were Gurkhas, regular soldiers, devoted to a lifetime of soldiering. They were subjects of the Maharajah of Nepal and were enlisted under a treaty between Great Britain and Nepal to serve in the Indian Army. They enlisted under special terms, slightly better than Indian Sepoys, as allies of, not subjects of, the British Crown. This agreement included the terms that they would only be under their own or British officers. By British law they were 'White Anglo-Saxon British subjects, whether domiciled in Great Britain, its Dominions and Colonies'.

Gurkhas claimed to be of Rajput descent but were of mixed race in which the Mongolian or Tibetan strain predominated. This was evident in their facial characteristics, for most had an almost pure Tartar appearance, although the Rajput or Aryan features did surface, for often the nose was a little heavy for the face.

Their culture was Hindu, possibly tainted by animism, so they were drawn into the great Hinduistic civilization. They were mainly of middling low caste, although one of the predominant martial races. They were non-vegetarian, non-teetotal Hindus who used tobacco. Caste held far less importance with them than it did for many, although not all Hindu troops.

Mercenary and professional soldiers originate almost always from poorly endowed countries which have little else to sell than their men and their skills. European mercenaries of note are Swiss, the Scots and the Irish and within this century, the French Foreign Legion recruited heavily from the unemployed of Germany and Eastern Europe.

The Gurkha enlisted from their grubby hill villages where they grubbed out a living, subsistence farming, forestry, goat herding and on the remittance of villagers, soldiering for the British Raj. They were a martial race and opted, if they could, for military service in the Indian Army or that of Nepal or one of the many Princely Indian States.

They came down at the age of puberty, about 12 or 13 years, to start as 'Boy Soldiers'. They were trained in the various Regimental Depots where the curriculum was three parts academic schooling and one part soldiering. At about 17 years, they entered a service battalion, usually the battalion which had returned to depot for leave and retraining. Thus they were not sent into the field until about 18 years of age. It was usual for a man to serve at least 21 years to gain full pension, but a very large proportion served on to the age ceiling which was 55 or 60. The latter portion would be served, subject to fitness, in base or depot duties.

Promotion was slow, at least 5 years to reach Lance Naik (Lance Corporal) usually more. Unless a man was specially sharp, few reached Havildar (Sergeant) under 12 years and Jemadar (A VCO) in less than 20 years. The smart, obviously gifted, were picked out much earlier and sent either to the Regimental Officer Cadet School or Wellesley College to gain their Viceroy's Commission. However, most promotion was either by service or promotion in the field.

There were three grades of Viceroy Commissioned officer, Jemadar, who wore one pip and acted as platoon commander and so on, assuming the usual duties of a Lieutenant. The title was changed to Naib-Subadar after independence. Subadars wore two pips, were Company Second in Commands and carried out the duties of a captain. Jemadars and Subadars also filled battalion staff roles, Jemadar-Adjutants, Jemadar-Quartermasters and so on. They wore pips on the epaulette exactly the same as any officer and were distinguished from a King's Commissioned Officer by a stripe across the epaulette. The Subadar-Major wore a Major's crown, and was, after the Colonel and Adjutant, the most influential officer in any

unit. He filled a dual role as a regimental officer on the Colonel's Staff and as the Senior Gurkha, the advocate and protector of the Gurkhas and their honour.

VCO's received a salute from Indian troops, but not from British other ranks (BORs) which was something of a bone of contention. The British Army regarded them as glorified Warrant Officers and certainly they ranked below King's Commissioned Officers. The Subadar-Major was inferior in rank to the most recently commissioned snotty-nosed 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant, whom he had to salute. However, beware the British Officer who crossed the Subadar-Major's path for influence with the Colonel outweighed that of British Captains and Majors.

We had no Subadar-Major, for the LRPG was rated as a detachment of the 2/5<sup>th</sup>, although a unit in its own right, and there was only one Subadar-Major to each battalion. The senior Subadar filled in this role quite adequately.

There were some 13 Gurkha clans which, with one exception, enlisted across the 10 Gurkha Rifle regiments. The exception was the 9<sup>th</sup> Gurkhas which enlisted only Khas Gurkhas. Why? I don't know. They may have been of a higher or lower caste than the others or have come from a distant and distinct area. They were more finely boned with more sharply defined features than most other clans. Racially they were the same people as the Garwhalis, who were for a long time enlisted in Gurkha units, who came from the United Provinces districts of Garwhal and Tehri Garwhal. They were related to the Kumaonis who came from the district of Panikhet and Nanital and from those small hill kingdoms in the Upper Punjab near Simla and toward the Kashmir border.

Gurkhas had no family name, only a given name and these were somewhat limited. Thus we could have a soldier Jagbir Gurung, Jagbir was the given name, Gurung the clan. There may well be 20 or 30 Jagbirs in a battalion, half of whom were Gurung Gurkhas. They were distinguished by number, usually the last two or three numerals of their regimental number.

It was quite common for the Gurkhas to marry and several had permission to live in married quarters. The Regiment provided medical services and some schooling for Gurkha families. By nature the Gurkha was a resilient, fun loving chap who skylarked constantly and while he appeared grumpy and surly on duty, this was mainly a matter of concentration. He stood from about 5 feet to five feet 3 or 4 inches, anything above that was tall, and developed the squat physique common to mountain men, as he matured in age.

There are several silly stories around about Gurkhas, which insult the intelligence of people. Gurkhas were flesh and blood, they had several attributes, particularly in field work and used their affinity with nature to great advantage. They did not possess these things alone. They were neither superhuman nor subhuman, as the stories suggest, but mortal men. The great myth concerns the kukri. The myth suggests that a Gurkha held the kukri to be sacred and would it draw it without drawing blood. What a load of old rubbish!

The kukri was a piece of issue equipment, worn as a common side-arm by Garwhali, Kumaoni, Coorg, Assam Rifles, several Princely State forces, some Dogras as well as Gurkhas. It was fairly common issue to troops of all race and army who went into Burma, as a jungle cutting knife in place of a machete. The kukri was the Hillman's fighting knife, it was also a hunting weapon, an agricultural tool and entrenching tool, or so used.

The kukri held a certain place in the Gurkhas pride which must be acknowledged. But the hoary old story should be laid to rest. It had its basis in an incident on a hospital ship evacuating wounded Gurkhas from Gallipoli. Many Gurkhas were carrying the hereditary family knife which was handed down from

generation to generation. This valued piece could not be surrendered without letting blood. The Gurkhas, believing that they were losing the family kukri, insisted on cutting the under flesh of the sick bay attendant's forearm. Actually each kukri was labelled, stored and eventually returned to its owner, if he lived and his family if he didn't.

The Gurkhas know the tale and use to discourage curious troops. Of course, one could always forget the bloodletting for the price of a few beers and cigarettes. The Gurkhas aren't silly you know.

They did have some unusual customs. When we were collecting our troops from the 2/5<sup>th</sup>, a certain Captain Schofiels was being promoted to Major. As we know, an officer is entitled to a butt salute, but a major being a field officer, was entitled to the present-arms by armed sentries.

On the morning that Schofield's promotion was promulgated, Sloan took me down to a point where we could observe events without being seen.

Schofield with his crown up marched down to the Quarter Guard and paraded up and down before the posted sentry. The sentry studiously ignored him. Schofield went up and Schofield went down before the sentry who gazed fixedly into space. Schofield roared like a bull, calling out the guard, whom he dressed down in a right old fashion. The worst, the sloppiest guard that he had ever seen and so on. You know the drill Jack! He then called for the daybook which the Naik of the Quarter Guard produced. Schofield wrote in it a *Chittito* the canteen Naik authorizing a double issue of rum for each member of the Quarter Guard. He got his 'present'.

The moral is that everybody knew Captain Schofield, but no living soul had heard of 'Major Schofield, so by way of introduction to the battalion, Major Schofield bought the Quarter Guard a drink. Schofield had to play out his part in the charade and the Quarter guard had to play out theirs. It was a tradition of this and some other regiments. A little thought on the matter illustrates the relationship within the Gurks units.

I have often felt that the Gurks (and others) could be compared with a very good Amateur Football team. Each member strives to increase and perfect the skills of the game and be considered a worthy member of the team. On the training track, at practice and in the hurly burly of the match, the coach, the captain and vice-captain are dictatorial martinets to be obeyed as they direct play, roar their instructions and hurt feelings. But once off the training field, once the match is over and the showers done, it is into the social room, where it is Jim and Bill and all good cobbors, the best of mates over a beer. This is not the analogy best suited, but it is nearer to explaining the situation vis-a-vis the Australian Army.

The 'Regiment', the battalion actually, was the home and family of the Gurks. The loyalty of a Gurkha to his unit was laudable, but it was a great problem to me. The troop was Corps of Signals and for the period of its existence, the Gurkhas were seconded to the Corps. The reason for this was practical and obvious, and it had very practical advantages for the Gurkha Sigs. However, they felt that they were being taken away from their unit and cast out into the cold hard world.

It had been explained that as Sigs they would, once trade grouped, pick up extra money in specialist pay. They were, after all, still working within the bosom of their own unit. It still shook their confidence in the order of things. That was my problem, or one of them.

The fact that the L RPGs were using regimental signallers to fill their sig troops didn't go down all that well with some who came to know of it. Gurkhas were considered excellent fighting men, enthusiastic cannon fodder, if you like, but nothing more. They were undervalued. Latterly, since independence, when Great Britain took over four Gurkha regiments first called the Gurkha Legion and changed to the Brigade of Gurkhas, they instituted Gurkha Artillery, Gurkha Engineers, Gurkha Signals, Gurkha Corps of

transport and son on, but in 1943 they couldn't concede that they were anything more than picturesque footsloggers.

The attitude was strange, because each battalion was self sufficient in the various clerical, signal and staff trades. Those who performed these highly skilled and necessary tasks were educated, literate, intelligent people as were all the NCOs and WOs and 30 of the 36 officers. This was a double standard in intellectual exercise and based not on obvious facts but upon assumptions steeped in racial and class superiority.

The troop NCO and effective 2<sup>nd</sup> I/C was Colour Havilder Jagbir Gurung. Jagbir had more service than I had years and was at the time a man in his late thirties. Jagbir had spent a number of tours of duty in the Signal platoon and had cut his teeth on flag, lamp and heliograph. Field cable work and instrument signalling over cable was at that period basic in battalion signals. Jagbir was in on the ground floor for wireless use by infantry, for although wireless had been used by higher formation HQs before the First World War, it was only latterly that a suitable man-pack transmitter-receiver had been available to the infantry. Jagbir could recall training on and using the old sparkers although these were not infantry issue.

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