QUEENSLAND NEWSLETTER JUNE 2012

OFC

The Coffee morning was held on 6 June 2012.

Present were 4727 Mike Edden, 5450 Dick Howlett, 6278 Gerry Dyer, 6303 Peter Nortje, 6604 John Gold, 6969 Billy Budd, 7012 Mike King, 7432 Will Keys and his friend Frank Gutteridge (ex-Rhodesian), Goofy Lawrence and 28014Z Mike Hayes who was able to take a morning off from his job to meet our guest from Zimbabwe, 5917 Rod Finnigan, who was staying with relatives in Ormeau, South East Queensland. Once again 5757 Ian Milton was unable to join us through ill health.

After the small number of members attending last month, it was gratifying to see the turn-out for Rod who entertained the gathering with Finnigan memories, past and present. All in all, a very enjoyable and successful gathering.

Referring to the book “Racing Mandela” by Ben Leeman, the story of the “Lesotho Liberation Army” and the “Azanian People’s Liberation Army”, that I reviewed last month, I had an email from Keith Samler in South Africa, who was involved with these organisations. He commented that Leeman was short on facts and had doubts about his other claims to fame.

Keith took the opportunity to renew contact with me after those 1977 – 1980 halcyon days as part of the National Intelligence Team. Just to add to these reminiscences I found Keith is mentioned in Dennis Croukamp’s book “The Rhodesian Bush War”, which is an excellent memoir of a decorated member of the RLI and Selous Scouts.

Mike Hayes very kindly produced posters relating to the BSA Police; miniature copies were given to all those present; he generously gave me a blown up copy of the poster, another on historic Bulawayo, yet another on Independence and finally some Rhodesian Flag and beer stickers. Thank you Mike for taking the time to obtain these and passing them on, but that doesn’t allow you to escape providing us with your motor cycle tour of Africa!

GENERAL

Following on from my meeting with the orthopaedic specialist on the 15th May I was summoned to the local hospital to give blood samples to the “Pre Anaesthetic Clinic”, which hopefully suggests that my day in hospital might be sooner rather than later.
STORIES BY MEMBERS

THE PAST
First, a bit of background here - the recruit squads immediately post WW11 were fortunate enough to arrive at Depot and met up with instructors, who were gentlemanly in their treatment of recruits, many of who had served in the war or else had served in the military on national service. At the same time, they were helpful to the British and South African school leavers and, all in all, the examples that they led, assisted those who benefitted from their training.

Sadly these men gave way to a different breed of instructor, some of who were well respected but some of them brought with them a different attitude, which was somewhat racist towards Rhodesian school leavers. This first story says it all and one has to have a chuckle these days when one or more of them got their comeuppance!

Depot Recruits Squad

Until recently, my internal dialogue said I was ex-Rhodesian. I have now spent most of my life in Australia and my internal dialogue now says that I am Australian. The point I’m making is that our informative years are extremely influential. 1965 was an informative year for me. I argue that before 1965, phrases such as “fair and balanced”, “consensus of opinion” or even “cruel and unusual punishment” had little or no currency.

I was about to turn 18. I looked 14. I weighed 130lbs; stood 6’1” tall and felt every inch like the “bag of weasel piss” that somebody had called me. It was my first day of induction to Squad 8 of 1965, Morris Depot. The Ordnance Stores had issued XXL size PT vest and shorts, for the use of. They knew or didn’t care that I would look ridiculous in them.

On the first day morning I had an ugly gorilla in my face. It had foul breath, yellow teeth and appeared to be frustrated. I’d heard the rumours about this particular primate. It circled me and said in an incredulous voice “What the HELL is this?” I stood rigidly still. “Recruit 7432 Keys, SIR” I could swear the animal was salivating. “My GOD! They have sent us a bloody SCHOOLBOY!” So, spoke Squad Instructor, Inspector Jerry Winchcome.

It was pre-UDI and our squad make-up was 90% Poms, three Rhodesians and rest were nondescripts. The average age of the squad was 22. They were men, I was a boy. We had a few ex UK Police and British Army types; they set the tone for the rest of us.

Winchcome called me “Schoolboy”, Lance Section Officer John Pierce followed suit. At stables, LSO Pierce usually singled me out to be the butt of his audacious pranks. It amused Mr Pierce to see “Schoolboy” hanging on to a rampaging horse for dear life, as it charged along the lines. I can still recall Mr Pierce’s screeching voice “Schoolboy, DON’T YOU DARE LET GO.” Pierce put me in some dangerous situations. I don’t think he gave a damn. I was the source of much unnecessary hilarity and amusement. Keep in mind this was all
at my expense. In retrospect, I was a tough kid and I could handle it. I might have done the same in reverse.

We celebrated our pass-out in Marris Depot. Half way through the evening I got a bee in my bonnet. I persuaded a squad mate to accompany me. I don’t think I told him what I had in mind. Anyway we went down to the stables and tethered two of Mr Pierce’s favourite horses. I remember the guy on piquet duty panicking. I’m sorry to say but I think I may have threatened him. He was after all only a recruit. We each led a horse and I carried a bale of hay. It took skill to get both horses into Mr Pierce’s small bedroom. I placed the hay on his bed. We then returned to the bar and I made the pronouncement. There was disbelief then total hilarity.

We knew that Mr Pierce usually returned to his digs around eleven. When the time arrived the squad gathered in various hiding places in and around Mr Pierce’s room. His punctuality did not disappoint. I will never forget the sight of the inside of his room when he switched on the lights. The horses became frightened and began kicking and jostling each other. They had distributed hay all over the place. Mr Pierce got one hell of a shock and screamed something intelligible. The squad bomb-shelled in every direction; I was stuck up a tree and had a perfect view. Mr Pierce stormed back to his car, passing just feet below me. He nearly flipped the car as he swerved speeding away.

It was winter and the sun rose late; DCI Trangmar faced us, his jaw jutting forward; his back to the Green Square. Mr Pierce gave the command “GET ON PARADE”. Our squad, having graduated the day before, stood on the extreme right of the parade. In unison we stepped forward and after exactly twenty two paces we halted. “RIGHT DRESS” the parade was “MADE STEADY” As we looked forward the dawn broke. There in the middle of the sacred Green Square was the incongruous sight of a skeleton of a horse. It had been placed there in the night. In training, we had been obliged to learn the medical name of all its bones. The parade broke up laughing.

DCI Trangmar demanded that “the person or persons who put the horses in LSO Pierces room, report to my office.” I was remorseful and prepared to face the music. I thought I’d probably get back-squadded or even discharged. The older members of the squad wouldn’t have it. They instructed us to keep quiet and that is what happened. Depot Instructors investigated. There was little pressure and I even got the impression that some instructors liked what had happened. Mr Pierce was not popular. Two days later we were transferred to the various Driving Schools.

I don’t know who dobbed me in but someone did. It was a senior Patrol Officer and getting married. I needed the lances for the guard-of-honour. Guess who I had to go to, to get them? When he heard my name he freaked. Things became a little edgy. I was no longer the skinny ‘schoolboy’ recruit that he had toyed with. We stood toe to toe, fortunately no blows were exchanged. Mr Pierce gave me a hard time, so, I suppose he did have the last laugh.

Will Keys.
Badge Collectors Night Mare

The "Home Guard" had changed hands, and it was now the Z.R.P. The year was around 1987, and I was the O/I/C Harare Store. I was sitting in my office, as you do, when a delegation of Senior Officers barged in. There was the S.O. (Ordnance), S.S.O. (Quartermaster), S.S.O. (Admin) and two plain clothed chaps. I found out later they were from the C.I.D.

I was questioned at length and was accused of running a “Club of the old regime, living in the past, and keeping the home fires burning” etc., etc. Needless to say I informed them that I did not know what they were referring to and asked them to explain what they were on about. They were very aggressive and at first would not tell me what was going on. I can assure you a very scary situation, especially when you do not know what they are going to do next.

They then accused me of “dealing” in badges of the “Dictator regime” against the interest and policy of not only the Police Force, but indeed against the Liberating Government of the day.

I asked them to again explain further, and I was informed that I was accused of giving out Police badges to badge collectors, clearly against the rules, and policy of P.G.H.Q.

I advised them that this was not the case at all, to which I was threatened with arrest and removal from my post. (A very scary situation.) I informed them that yes, I, as the O/I/C, had to send and give out Police badges, caps etc to collectors not only locally but also internationally; however, only in compliance with the instructions from P.G.H.Q. I was instructed to expand on this. This I did, by producing the letters from the various badge collectors, stapled with the official letter addressed to that person by P.G.H.Q. acknowledging receipt of the original letter and c.c. to me instructing me to comply and send them the requested badges.

Well, you can imagine the reaction to that. There was a lot of Huffing and Puffing, and talking among themselves. They then turned to me and demanded the letters in question, to which I naturally refused saying they could have photo copies. They then stormed out, saying that I would be hearing from them at a later date.

A few days later a letter duly arrived signed by S.S.O. (Q) instructing me to cease the practice of assisting badge collectors, even when and if approved by P.G.H.Q. (??). This letter went on further and instructed me to burn all the old uniforms and badges etc., and that this was to be conducted by and witnessed by the store’s internal auditors. (Naturally, one of them)

At this point of time I must explain that the Store had, since the year dot, kept a new sample of every badge, buckle, bow and uniform for the "one day" Police
Museum. This included a lot of items going back to the old B.S.A.P. Co., days. (Really good stuff as you can imagine.) This also included all the old medals and their miniatures. The list goes on and on……

I was also phoned by the S.S.O. (Q) and instructed to comply with the aforementioned instructions and including the auditors in every step of the way.

Well, what do you think of that??

Needless to say, I did not do all I was instructed. I made a lot of frantic phone calls to all the collectors I knew, and all their wildest dreams had come true; my staff at the Store were really onsides, and the auditors fully understood what had happened and, where they could, turned a blind eye. The uniforms were duly destroyed.

At this point of time I must point out that I too suddenly became a badge collector.

You can imagine what my collection looked like, all mounted on two huge glass fronted wooden frames, really super.

The story gets better!! A few weeks later I had a visit from two Supts again from, yes, you got it in one. They informed me that they had been instructed by the Commissioner, to set up, yes (boy you are getting good!!!!!!) The Police were joining the other Forces and were going to get involved and participate in the Forces Museum in the Midlands.

Here again, I produced the last letter on this subject to them, and the rest as they say, is History.

It would appear that my sins were forgiven, as I was promoted twice after leaving the Store, to a S/C/Insp.

The end of a very sad, but true, story; “never in a Thousand Years” is still a very true statement”.

My story is also very sad. I was forced to sell my very big and complete collection upon leaving the country. With the Zim Dollar falling off the cliff and the Australian Government requiring A$7O 000.00 for my wife and I to get in. We did get in and it’s been worth it, we arrived during 2005.

Kind Regards, John Ogston.

THE PRESENT

LIFE AFTER THE BSAP
By Peter Nortje 6303
Mid-year of 1964 I was stationed at Salisbury Information Room.

One Saturday afternoon I returned to Main Station and was instructed to drive two officers home. During the trip several questions were asked and I had the feeling that my answers were not well received.

A few days later I decided that the Police was not an option for my future.

After receiving my discharge papers and walking out of the Charge Office a B Car drove out of Main Station. It was sad to think that I would never drive a B Car again, but I was also nervous and excited as to what my future was going to be.

A few weeks later after an interview with a company for the position of Storeman, the Manager suggested that they were looking to train a person at the factory as a sheet metal worker and wondered if I was interested in that. This was a good decision as it was the trade which saw me through my working years until I retired nearly four years ago. The only time I was not working was when we either moved towns or countries (of which there were a few).

At High School, Geography was my favourite subject and Australia was one of the countries I chose to study. It was at this time the seed was planted, and a drive across Australia was a ‘must do’ on my list.

I got married to Carol in February 1966 at the Franciscan Friary on Beatrice Road. Our honeymoon was a road trip to Cape Town and back via the Garden Route.

February 1968 Carol and I set sail from Cape Town for Fremantle on board the ss Australis.

My first job in Perth was in a tractor factory but that only lasted for 3 weeks as the job they promised me never eventuated. I then got a job in the brickworks, as a kiln operator, at three times the pay. Carol got an office job in a Holden spares warehouse. Our first mode of transport was a Honda 100cc motorbike and then in July 1968 we bought our mighty Mini 850 cc which was four years old and just over 50,000 miles on the clock.

In March 1969 we loaded the Mini for our trip across the Nullarbor to Melbourne. On the roof was a large custom made roof rack with 2 spare wheels, 1 gallon Petrol, 1 gallon water, a wooden trunk, portable BBQ, 2 deck chairs and an esky. We had our personal possessions, clothes, sewing machine etc. in the boot.

We had the seats modified so as to lay back and make a bed. Carol made a sleeping bag to fit the bed area and also curtains for the windows. We left Perth on 26th March 1969. The RAC of WA supplied maps and instructions. The first being that if we broke down to stay with the car, as at that time an average of 11 cars per day crossed the Nullarbor. The second was if we saw a stick upright in
a puddle, it indicated that it was too deep for a family car. This was by courtesy of the truck drivers.

Our first stop was Kalgoorlie where we met up with some friends from Perth that were working there. Our highlight of our stay was a night drive down Hay Street, a well known red light district, where there was a row of about 20 tin sheds with large front windows where the ladies sat on display waiting for customers. Later that night we went for a drink at the Bolder Hotel (4 rooms). Just before closing time the barmaid passed a book around for us all to sign showing we had booked into the hotel for the night. There were about 40 patrons in all. After midnight the local policeman came in, picked up the book and checked the names of those present, all correct, he left and we carried on drinking.

The following day we were on the road again. That night we pulled into a truck stop outside Caiguna, 689 miles from Perth. In the morning I woke to a humming sound. I got out the car to find us surrounded by 5 huge refrigeration trucks. I started cooking breakfast and one of the drivers came over and asked me where I slept, I told him in the Mini with my wife. He then called the other driver over to see us and one took our photo standing next to the Mini. They told us the road ahead was in bad condition and to take it easy, we only had 57 miles of tar before we hit the dirt road, then about an hour and a half driving time before we came to the South Australian Border. It was the end of the wet season and the road had large puddles, some deep ruts that had hardened from the sun and also Bull dust as fine as talcum powder. Along the dirt section we were very lucky as the wind was blowing from our left so the dust from oncoming vehicles did not cross our path.

Our next night was at Eucla 893 miles from Perth. We were now about to cross the Nullarbor. The next two petrol stops were at sheep stations approximately 5 miles off the road. Petrol pump was of the old glass cylinder type two gallons at a time. The farmer’s wife sold us the petrol and gave us tea and scones and we had a long chat. The next stop was on the side of the road then the following night at Ceduna. Here the fruit fly inspector searched our car for fruit. The boot of the Mini was taped up to stop the dust from getting in. I had a hard time convincing the inspector that there was no fruit in the boot and that there was no more tape to reseal it if I opened it. He finally agreed to let us go. Next stop was Port Lincoln and the end of the dirt road 528 miles in total. We arrived in Adelaide two days later and spent Easter there in an onsite caravan. What luxury. Melbourne was 3 days away and the end of our trip of 1754 miles.

I worked for Kefer Brothers who were automotive part manufacturers, and Carol worked for a timber merchant in accounts. We had some lovely weekends away in the snow on four occasions and one trip to Canberra. We spent 9 months in Melbourne and thoroughly enjoyed it, being so different to anywhere else we had lived; seeing the changing of the seasons; Carol going to work by tram, and not being able to see across the road for the fog, Milk being delivered by horse and cart; Quite a different world in those days.
November of 1969 the Mini was loaded aboard the ss Himalaya bound for Auckland, New Zealand. The next three years we spent in Auckland and toured the North Island from top to bottom. I worked for Masport Industries making lawnmowers. Our daughter Michelle was born in Auckland and she was driven home from the hospital in the Mini.

During the four years that I had the Mini the only maintenance on the car was a valve grind and decoke, 4 clutches, 2 cv joints, 4 sets of tyres and 1 battery. The Mini never let us down and started first turn every time. Now every time I see a Mini, even the new ones, brings back lovely memories of a great trek across Australia and New Zealand.

Carol was very homesick for Rhodesia after the birth of Michelle, so we went back in October 1972 aboard the ss Canberra.

I got a job with Capital Brake. Our son Ross was born at the Lady Chancellor in 1974, and in 1976 we made up our minds to go back to New Zealand.

I got a job at Tru-Test Industries as factory manager. Once the children were at school Carol got a part-time job with Dick Hopper 5339 (ex BSAP) in Insurance. We went to the Gold Coast for a holiday in 1983 and fell in love with Queensland, which reminded us more of Africa. In 1986 we decided to leave New Zealand and settle in Queensland, Australia.

I bought a security grille business and worked my socks off, before selling the business and getting a job with McDonalds doing maintenance on all the equipment. I was with them for 22 years until I retired.

We lived on the Gold Coast for twelve years before the humidity became too much for us, and then we moved inland a bit to Tamborine Mountain where we
are still living. We have now got a campervan, so we can go off on trips around Australia, but still have a home to come back to.

Peter and Carol Nortje

The Outback Experience

During the coffee morning on Wednesday 6 June there was a fair bit of discussion relating to travels in the Outback, which a number of our members are enjoying in their retirement.

This brought to mind an experience my wife, Jan, and I had quite recently in Bourke, NSW.

We don’t own a caravan of any kind so we stay in preselected accommodation. Jan is the one who does the pre-selection and she is a very good at it, finding the best deals and good places.

We generally treat ourselves to at least one really good stay and meal on these trips and in this case we made sure that the accommodation we had booked in Bourke, The Bourke Riverside Motel, had a recognized restaurant and, in fact, while we were checking with them they bragged about their Outback multi star, award winning restaurant. This was one of the reasons we decided to stay there end we confirmed that this service would be available. They assured us it would be.

After a few days driving and staying in various nondescript accommodations on the way, we got there. The accommodation did not disappoint and I’ve included a couple of pictures so you can see how grand it was with all the colonial period furniture, including four poster bed and the like. (Not passed on – E) I have to admit though that the ominous creaking from the back of the chair that I first sat in made me very cautious. There were modern facilities too including a plasma TV if I remember correctly. This was no cheapie and was meant to be the highlight of the trip.

The unique Aussie outback experience then started when we went to book a table in the restaurant. “Ah yes, we’re sorry but the chef has had to go away and the restaurant is closed. But we really came here to experience the restaurant”, we said. “Sorry! But there’s nothing we can do, it won’t be open again until your visit is over. What you can do is go down to the local Bowls Club where they have a good Chinese Restaurant”. (Every town in Australia has got a Chinese, nothing exotic in that!).

Anyway we resigned ourselves to the fact that Chinese it would have to be if we were going to eat at all and started checking things out. We could see the bowls club from our accommodation; it was probably a 5 minute walk away. So we said “OK we can walk down there and it will be a nice stroll back again after eating. Oh no, don’t do that we will arrange for the club to send a minibus. But it’s only five minutes away-no trouble at all to walk. But it will be dark and you don’t want to walk down there at that time”.

And so we didn’t walk and the club drove us back to our accommodation after the meal as well. We found it quite disturbing that it is not recommended to walk down an Australian country town’s main street in the dark. But it’s not only in Bourke, there are worse places believe me. In some places we visited it was recommended we didn’t stop at all, no matter what the time of day.

For the record the Chinese meal was very good and Bourke, itself, has some very good attractions. The visitor information centre is modern with multi-screen-audio-visual facilities, which appeals to me of course, and you can get back in time a bit by going on an old steamer on the river.

On the other hand the much vaunted fort turned out to be a few trees lashed together in a square.

As they say the Outback experience is indeed unique.

Dick Howlett.

And that good people is it for this month. It was great to see and have a chat with Rod Finnigan, but it was his remark about current life in Zimbabwe that said it all anyway. “You don’t retire in Zimbabwe anymore; you stay in your job until you fall off the perch”.

Having re-connected with Eddie Cross and his newsletters one can see that there are still a few optimists around, but it is going to be a hard slog to get rid of the rubbish in the country and turn it into a true democracy.

Best wishes
Mike Edden ADMINISTRATOR
15 June 2012