

VicRoads Association

Newsletter No. 240



Troops de-bugging their beds, Changi, by Murray Griffin

Membership of the Association is available to all who have been members of VicRoads or forerunner organisations or the spouse of deceased members, and bestows on them all the rights of the Rules of Association. Cost of membership is a once only fee of \$50. Enquiries about membership or receipt of the Newsletter by e-mail should be directed to the Secretary, VicRoads Association, PO Box 80, Kew 3101 or by phone or e-mail as shown in the footer below. Visit our website at vicroadsassociation.org

Dear Members,

Because I have had this newsletter written for some time, I have decided to squeeze an additional one in this year to clear the decks as it were.

First of all – Happy New Year!

Normally, in the first newsletter for the year, I would describe the things we have done recently such as our wonderful Christmas lunch and our recent trip to Benalla-Shepparton – but I will keep them for the next newsletter.

However, there was one thing that struck me about the Christmas lunch and it is this. No one changes. I met and laughed with people I had worked with over 60 years ago, and although they are older, they are still the same people I knew back then. Although many of us moved on to new places and friendships we still enjoy coming together at events like the Christmas lunch.

For many people, social networks shrink with age, but in our case, the value of friendship increases with age. We may not be best friends but we are 'glued' together because of our shared history and our tolerance towards each other. The people I know now are pretty much the same as the people I knew then. This leads to the inevitable conclusion that our personalities are formed in our childhood. I think it is one of the strengths of organisations like the VicRoads Association.

Incidentally, Nick Szwed has posted photos of the Christmas lunch on our website, vicroadsassociation.org/end-of-year-lunch-2019/

He can also provide high resolution copies if anyone wants one (or more).

David Jellie,
Chairman and Editor



Some of the better looking people who attended our Christmas lunch. Back row left to right: Swarna Bharatullah, Asha Jamini, Jill Earnshaw, Patsy Kennedy. Front: Birute Don, Annette Willis, Lyn Briggs and Iris Whittaker.

What's coming up

Occasional Lunches at Shoppingtown Hotel 12 noon

Our next lunch will be held on Monday 6 February 2023. There is no longer a requirement to contact Kelvin York – just turn up.

Annual Golf Day

We propose to schedule our Golf Day for later in the year – possibly November.

Other events

We will provide details in the next newsletter.

Membership

Iris Whittaker has done an amazing job in sorting out our membership database and it appears that we have, at the time of writing this newsletter, 294 members. Their names are shown in the list below.

When a member dies, we provide the option to the partner and family to continue receiving the newsletter so that they can keep in contact with us. Their names – as far as we know – are not included in the list. If your name is in this list and you are not a member – but are a partner or a family member or friend – please contact me. We are still happy to send the newsletter to you but we won't include your name in the membership list.

Bruce Addis	Ray Brindle	Lloyd Davies	Ian Grant
Rob Aitken	Charlie Broadhurst	Stephen Day	Margaret Gray
Geoffrey Allen	Barry Bromham	Graeme Deany	Anne Green
John Allen	Graham Brookes	Bill Degnan	John Griffith
Gordon Anderson	Frank Brown	Doug Dick	Eve Grimm
Richard Anderson	Steve Brown	David Dix	Lyle Grinter
Neil Aplin	Len Brush	Barry Docking	Kevin Hadingham
Vic Asher	Glen Buckeridge	Birute Don	Edward Hall
Nigel Ashton	Les Bull	Valerie Dripps	Bruce Hamilton
Barry Atkinson	Maurice Burley	Jill Earnshaw	Clive Hamilton
Weislawa Babos	Warren Butcher	Gary Edwards	John Harding
John Baldock	Norman Butler PSM	Simon Eggleston	Alan Harman
Peter Balfe	Jan Cahill	Robert Ekers	John Hart
Ted Barton PSM	David Capon	Howard Ellis	Wayne Harvey
Edgar Bartrop	Robert Carr	Max Ervin	Albert Haslett
Colin Bates	Ivan Chislett	Russell Fairlie	Peter Hassett
Greg Beeton	John Clark	Emery Faraday	Rick Hattam
Margaret Bennett	Lindsay Clay	David Ferguson	Ron Hawken
Margaret Best	John Cleeland	Barry Fielding	Norman Henry
Swarnalata Bharatula	John Clinch	John Finlay	Michael Hoare
Joe Black	Alan Collins	John Fitz	Mike Hodgson
David Blore	William Collins	John Foote	Noel Hoitinga
Bob Body	Donald Collis	Bruce Ford	Tim Holden
Evan Boloutis	Julie Cooper	John Ford	Alex Home
Richard Bortko	Peter Crabbe	Kevin Fox	Emil Horbelt
Trevor Boyd	John Cunningham (Rural)	Tony Fry	Geoff Hose
Bill Brake	John Cunningham (Metro)	Roger Gamble	Peter Hosking
Ray Bridger	Ken Daley	John Gavin	Doug Howes
Lynette Briggs	Bill Dalrymple	Stewart Gavin	Don Howie
		Garnett Gibbs	Howard Hughes
		John Gibney	Asha Jamini
		Bill Gill	David Jellie
		Joan Gilmer	Graeme Johnson
		Roy Gilmour	Sandra Johnston
		Rob Gilpin	Glyn Jones
		Graham Gilpin PSM	Laurie Jones
		Tom Glazebrook AM	Norma Jones
		Ted Goddard	Don Jordan
		Ian Goldie	Horst (Ozzie) Kayak
		Ross Gordon	Brian Kemp
		Jean Graff	Greg Kemp

Patsy Kennedy
Mal Kersting
Malcolm King
Geoffrey Kloot
Joseph Klopfer
Leanne Knudsen
Colin Kosky
Urszula Koziell
Harry Kruize
Arun Kumar
Alan Lade
Geoff Lawrence
Max Lay AM
John Liddell
Wyn Linstedt
Paul Low
Peter Lowe
Alan Mackinley
I.T. Manujlenko
Reg Marslen
Ken Mathers
Anne Mathews
Doug Mathews
Esther Matthysz
Harold Matthysz
Jim McClusky
Peter McCulloch
Peter McCullough
Peter McDonald
Doug McLaine
Janet McNamara
Rob McQuillen
Dom Meadley
Patrick Meehan
Lance Midgley
David Miles
Gordon Mills
Sandor Mokos
Trevor Moore
Robert Morgan
Marie Morison

Jim Morse
John Moylan
Ian Mullen
Ron Muller
Ross Munro
Jaroslav Mychajlyszyn
David Nash
John Nation
Brian Negus
Dawn Newby
Graeme Newman
Ray Nicholas
Hugh O'Brien
Marilyn O'Connor
Noel Osborne
Max Palmer
Bob Parr
Ross Paul
Leslie Pearce
Heather Pearson
Wayne Perrett
Alan Perry
Linton Peterson
William Peyton
Bruce Phillips
Trevor Phillips
Don Purdue
Frank Rapattoni
Geoff Rayner
John Rebbechi
Kathy Renic
Andrew Ricketson
Robyn Robb
Wayne Robb
Alastair Robinson
David Rolland
David Rowland
Colin Roy
George Rumbens
Innes Russell
Gregory Ryan

Bill Saggars
Barbara Salmela
Malcolm Sanders
Ted Saunder
Robin Saunders
Eddie Schubert
Gemot Schubert
Mervyn Seeney
John Seward
Robert Shovelton
David Shrimpton
Kenneth Sinclair
Andrew Skotnicki
Tom Smallman
John Smelt
Bob Solly
Mary Spilar
Geoff Spring
Leon Stevens
Erika Stokans
Graeme Stone
Keith Story
Geoff Symons
Nance Symons
Philip Symons
Nick Szwed
Kevin Tehan
Ian Thiele
Bill Thomas
Owen Thomas
Doug Thompson
Roger Thorp
David Tilley
Jenny Tolley
James Trajcevski
Derek Trewarne
Joan Tucker
Paul Tucker
Neil Tull
Henry Turnbull
Bill Turner

Gerry Turner
Stanley Turner
Bruce Van Every
David Veith
Gary Veith
Mike Verey
Ken Vickery
Peter Vulcan
John Waddell
Eileen Walsh
Graeme Walter
Richard Warwick
Jack Waters
June Watson
Laurie Watson
Lester Watt
Jim Webber
Jan Weinberg
Phil West
Gary White
David Williams
Mervyn Williams
Richard Williams
David Williamson
Annette Willis
Bill Wilson
Jim Winnett
John Wright
Kelvin York
Linda Zamprognio

New members

Robert Morgan

Here's new Association member, Rob Morgan at work with the CRB on the Mornington Peninsula Freeway project at Dromana on 16th December 1971.

The photo is on the Nepean Highway, at the north end of the project. Rob was studying civil engineering and this was a holiday work experience job. He remembers that Lance Midgely was the project manager and Richard Draper (probably the photographer) was the surveyor. Ah, the good old days before the invention of safety vests, and with no roadwork speed limits – or traffic, for that matter.

Rob became a road safety expert!



News from members

Ian Goldie

After reading your latest Newsletter (No 238), it reminded me that I had read earlier about the proposed part privatisation of our licensing section, in my mind a **bad idea**. Some time back we had a branch out the northwest area of Melbourne that had the reputation of being easy to get your licence. It took some time to lose the stigma that had built up and that was with us running it. Can you image how it would be under privatisation?

There are very few instances where privatisation has had any benefits. Examples are the SEC, Gas & Fuel, Vic Roads (road construction and maintenance), Medibank, Telstra, our jail system. You could go on for quite some time.

I retired from the RSL State Executive as a Board Member at Anzac House Collins Street some time back. After that, I was Vice President at Moe RSL Club and later Secretary. I have since retired there after four years, but Lynese is still State Secretary of the Women's Council at Anzac House. So, we have still been travelling around the State – a little less during Covid of course. During these travels I was astounded at how bad our roads are.

Some examples:

- Road signs laying in all directions, when standing up they are covered in lichen or graffiti, guideposts may as well not be there, they lie in all directions if they are still standing and are dirty, along with the signs.
- Rubbish is horrendous – it's everywhere and of every type, that is if you can see it through the uncut grass.
- Drains not cleaned, culverts not cleaned, heavy layers of soil and grass at the offside edge of the shoulders which holds water.

I was at my doctors one afternoon and a contractor's patrolman came in to see his doctor. I thought this is a good opportunity and I asked him where he put the rubbish he picked up when he got back to his depot. He replied we are told not to pick up any rubbish, we are to only do the job we are sent out to do, then return to our depot.

David, I would like to hear from our members and get their thoughts on today's roads if that is possible, if not I have had my moan about the situation, that's about all I can do now.

I hope you are keeping well David; we are struggling along still.

Best Regards
Ian Goldie

Bob Carr

Bob came to the art exhibition to which I contributed and it was great to catch up with him after so many years. We worked together on West Gate and played tennis regularly. He is a lovely bloke and I was very pleased to see him – if only for a little while.

In the course of our conversation, Bob mentioned that he was a great fan of the Goon Show – a passion I also share. I wrote about this passion in my book, *An Accidental Engineer*. I was at High School at the time and every Sunday night we tuned in to 3LO to listen to the zany adventures of Neddy Seagoon, Eccles, Bluebottle, Major Dennis Bloodnok, Minnie Bannister, Henry Crun, Gryptype-Thynne and Moriarty. At school on the following day, we re-enacted their adventures.

Bob then told me that he was a member of the Goon Show Preservation Society which has branches in many countries including Australia. Prince Charles was the Patron of the Society but now that he is King Charles III they are not sure that he will continue.

Bob recently wrote to Peter Embling, the Newsletter Editor of the Goon Show Preservation Society. He wrote

Dear Peter,

I was going through my old stuff and came across this drawing I did in 1954 when I was 13 years old and thought I should share it with other Goon Show fans.

We, as a family, emigrated to Melbourne, Australia when I was 17 years old.

As you will already know Spike had family here in Australia in Woy Woy and so he came out here a few times. I was lucky enough to see him in one of his Q shows he had at the Comedy Theatre in Melbourne. I can also remember Spike being in the ABC Radio studio and interrupting Rod McNeil the newsreader while he was broadcasting the news with some of his comic utterances.

Hope you enjoy the drawing

Bob Carr (Bobby)

Bob loved the show and very rarely missed an episode. Being on the radio, Bob had his own picture in his mind of what the characters looked like and the picture was the result. He sent the drawing to the BBC and it was returned to him with the signatures of the cast; Peter Sellers, Spike Milligan, Harry Secombe, Wallace Greenlade, Minnie Bannister, Henry Crun, together with two tickets to their Sunday radio recording performance at a theatre in London.

His mother took him and they loved the show. That's when he found out that the Goon Show always started with audience laughter as Spike Milligan came out before the show and warmed the audience with his amazing humour.

Bob said that his two drawings of Bluebottle and Eccles in the later cartoon videos of the Goon Show seemed to be similar to his drawings of them.

I have taken out a subscription to the Society.



Bob Carr's Goon Show drawing when he was 13 years old.

LEST WE FORGET



There were many CRB staff members who were prisoners of war of the Japanese. When I first started at the CRB in the early '60s, Frank Jackson worked in an office fairly close to me. Occasionally, Ian (Paddy) O'Donnell, who was the Chairman at the time, would appear out of the blue to see Frank – a Pipe Testing Officer. Together, they entered the specifications office and closed the door behind them for half an hour. Someone explained to me that they were both prisoners of the Japanese in Changi.

It is impossible for anyone who didn't experience the horror of the Japanese POW camps to fully appreciate the bond that developed between men who experienced this sort of Hell and that bond extended well beyond their time in camp. I came to realise that Paddy was providing support to Frank – and perhaps, vice versa.

Over 22,000 Australian men and women became prisoners of war (POWs) of the Japanese. Most were Army personnel – about 21,000. There were about 350 Royal Australian Navy men and about 370 Royal Australian Air Force aircrew. There were also 40 nurses and hundreds of Australian civilians.

The Army prisoners were largely from the 8th Division captured at the fall of Singapore. Australian troops were also captured on Java, Timor, Ambon and New Britain. Prisoners of war were formed into work parties to provide forced labour for the Japanese army. Throughout the war, Changi in Singapore was the main camp from which working parties were sent to other destinations and through which prisoners of war captured in other areas were staged.

Australian prisoners of war were sent from Singapore to Burma, Thailand, Japan, Borneo, Manchuria, Indochina, Formosa and Korea.

According to the Australian War Memorial, of the 22,376 Australian prisoners of war captured by the Japanese, 8,031 died while in captivity. The Japanese indifference and brutality to their captives was palpable and after the end of the war, War Crimes Trials were held to investigate reports of atrocities, massacres and other causes of death.

While pondering this history over the last two years or so, I can't help feeling that the fate of all these men and women who became prisoners of war of the Japanese was caused, in the main, by the Australian Government and its military hierarchy. Sure, we weren't prepared for war, just like the rest of the Allies, but there is no evidence that we stepped back and analysed our options based on solid, reliable intelligence. Instead, we were caught unawares without any appreciation of Japanese military capability and strategy. The Japanese, on the other hand, already had strong underground networks within South East Asia. Their fifth columnists had infiltrated all levels of business and society – even high levels in government circles.

Australian military leaders used guesswork in assessing the numbers and disposition of Japanese forces and armour. Pity the fate of Lieutenant Colonel Robertson, Commander of the 2/29th Battalion at the Battle of Muar. A highly respected leader of his men and a decorated veteran of the First World War, he doubted that tanks would be used in the Malayan theatre. He rejected the use of anti-tank guns to protect the perimeter around the battalion and, in the end, paid a heavy price. In order to report the dire situation to Brigade Headquarters accurately (all wireless communication had been lost, and runners were being ambushed by snipers), Robertson decided to go himself. Riding pillion on a motorcycle, he and his despatch rider raced down the road and as they approached a Japanese roadblock, they were gunned down by the waiting force. The despatch rider managed to turn the bike around and return with Robertson severely wounded clinging onto the back of the bike. Before he died, Robertson apologised to his command for the way he handled the battle.

Australia's army was ill-equipped and, initially, undermanned. Its military technology was outdated or non-existent. They knew little of modern military tactics and equipment – and in the end, Australia's first foray into the Pacific War was an unmitigated disaster. All of the 8th Division was lost to overwhelming Japanese forces by the end of February 1942. Most members of the division became prisoners of war – over a third of them died in captivity and the survivors had to wait until late 1945 to be liberated. These poor souls were sent off to war by their military commanders who knew that they had little chance of success. Many were captured without firing a shot.

The British, too, must bear some responsibility. Such was their hubris, they thought that the battles ahead of them would be over in weeks. The British had 20 years to strengthen their positions and plan their strategy. Their colonial attitude led to overconfidence which, together with their bad planning and ignorance of modern warfare, resulted in catastrophe. The final outcome led to a rift between Australia and Britain, the effects of which still exist today. The humiliating defeat was regarded as a turning point in Australia's relationship with its colonial relationship with Britain.

Following the First World War, Australia reviewed its strategic position in the world and concluded, correctly, that the greatest threat to its security was Japan. Australia's conservative governments during the 1920s and 1930s continued to rely on Britain to protect Australia along with

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AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

ART24480

Painting by Murray Griffin in 1942 entitled 'Changi Prison Camp, early days'.



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

ART24486

Troops de-bugging their beds, Changi, by Murray Griffin, 1942-43: Lice, rashes, 'happy feet' resulting from malnutrition, hunger and trips to the bore-hole latrines constantly disrupted sleep.



LEST WE FORGET



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

ART24477

Prime Minister Winston Churchill announced that the fall of Singapore was the 'worst disaster and largest capitulation in British history'.

Action at Parit Sulong,
January 1942 – 2/15th
Australian Field Regiment –
by Murray Griffin.

other British colonies in Asia - India, Burma, Malaya and Hong Kong.

In 1919, Britain chose Singapore, strategically located in the Strait of Malacca between the Pacific and Indian oceans, as the site of a major British naval base. Some called it Fortress Singapore. The strategy was that if war broke out in the Pacific, the British would relocate a large fleet of Royal Navy vessels from Britain to Singapore. In 1923 construction began on the massive 54-square-kilometre base. Australia and New Zealand both invested in the construction of the facility.

However, when war broke out with Germany it was realised that the Fortress Singapore strategy was in jeopardy. Britain needed to concentrate on its own preservation. The fleet of aircraft carriers and battleships that had been promised for the defence of the Empire's eastern possessions was reduced to a single squadron centred around one battleship, HMS *Prince of Wales*, and one battlecruiser, HMS *Repulse*. Japanese aircraft sunk both ships north of Singapore on 10 December 1941. This left the base without significant naval protection.

But the strategy was flawed in any case. The Japanese invasion came from the north. The Imperial Japanese Army invaded the Malay Peninsula on 8 December 1941, landing in the north at Kota Bharu in Malaya and Pattani and Songkhla in Thailand. The Japanese were battle-hardened,

well-organised and well-supported by air and armour; the inexperienced Allied forces could offer little resistance and the Japanese moved with incredible speed south along the peninsula. Kuala Lumpur was taken on 11 January and Johore, capital of Malaya's southern state, fell on 14 January. The Japanese had fought the 700 kilometres from their northern landings to the southern tip of the peninsula in less than two months.

On 31 January 1942, Allied forces withdrew across the causeway linking Malaya and Singapore. The defence of the island was poorly planned and executed. Allied forces were spread too thin to resist the Japanese when they landed on the north-west of the island on 8 February. Allied air cover had been almost completely destroyed in the opening days of the campaign and so the city was being bombed at will.

Despite being heavily outnumbered, the Japanese moved quickly across the island. With one million citizens trapped in the city and water supplies at critical levels British commander Lieutenant General Arthur Percival surrendered on 15 February 1942. More than 130,000 Allied troops were taken prisoner. A quarter of Australia's army was captured. The Japanese General Tomoyuki Yamashita had achieved a remarkable feat of arms.

In London, Prime Minister Winston Churchill announced that the fall of Singapore was the 'worst disaster and largest capitulation in British history'. For Australia too, the

fall of Singapore was a disaster. From 1942, the Australian government under Prime Minister John Curtin looked increasingly towards the US for its future protection. Mr Curtin had signalled the change in a new year radio address to Australians weeks before Singapore fell. He said:

"Without any inhibitions of any kind, I make it clear that Australia looks to America, free of any pangs as to our traditional links or kinship with the United Kingdom ... we shall exert all our energies towards the shaping of a plan, with the United States as its keystone, which will give our country some confidence of being able to hold out until the tide of battle swings against the enemy."

And so it was.

A different sort of war had begun for those who were captured. The words of one survivor, Paddy O'Toole, pricked my consciousness. He seemed to sum it up when he said:

"We were just gun-fodder. It was a political stunt, that's all. They sent the cream of Australian youth into a battle where they had no possible chance in the wide world of winning. That's about all it was, a political stunt."

I include the story of two CRB colleagues who were prisoners of war the Japanese.

Corporal Douglas Leslie Brumley

VX64333, V42108



Douglas Brumley's paybook photo.

Douglas was a 25 year old clerk at the CRB when he joined up in October 1941. He was born in Sale (in 1916) but he enlisted at Royal Park leading me to think that he worked in one of the CRB's Melbourne offices. He is one of those on the list in Appendix 1 but we know nothing but his name – and what is in the archives. He was a Sergeant in the Citizen's Military Force with a Service No. of V42108. Douglas was a fully qualified accountant.

Douglas was taller than most – six feet one and a half inches – with fair hair. No doubt because he was an accountant, he was posted to 8th Divisional Head Quarters Command Pay Office and he remained in that unit when he embarked for Malaya on the SS 'Marella' which arrived in Singapore on 26 January 1942.

The next entry, two months later, simply states "Missing". This came from the AIF in Malaya. In June 1943, his file is stamped in capital blue letters which can't possibly be missed PRISONER OF WAR and then Malaya is written after it. The last entry in his archive came six months later. It was handwritten and said 'Now imprisoned in Osaka camp'. To be more precise, it was the Osaka 6B – Akenobe Camp.



Four Australian Prisoners of War at Osaka Camp.

All the prisoners from the camp worked for various transportation and stevedoring companies of the Osaka Port. They loaded and unloaded ships, transported materials, worked in warehouses and loaded and unloaded railroad cars at the docks. They worked on all kinds of goods, usually foodstuffs and clothing but sometimes military equipment consigned to Japanese armies in the South Pacific.

A sample day's rations was:

Breakfast: Rice and soup.

Lunch (carried by the POWs to work): Rice, sometimes bread, seaweed.

Dinner: Rice and soup, fish every 10 days, meat once or twice a month; vegetables (one kind each night either onions or potatoes).

Douglas married Mary Elizabeth Cooper in 1946 and the electoral rolls show that he shifted to Bendigo and then, in the 1960s, to Canberra.

He died in Canberra in October 1976 at the age of 60.

Lieutenant Colonel Merton Conroy Morgan 3166 (VX38985)

Merton was born in Merton, Tasmania, in April 1916. Merton was a small village in northern Tasmania, near Glenorchy. The site of the village was inundated after the construction of the Tolosa dam – to provide Glenorchy's freshwater supply. He was the youngest son of a military family. His father was also a Lieutenant Colonel.

Merton attended the Royal Military College at Duntroon, graduating at 20 years of age as a



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Corporal in 1936. He was appointed to the Australian Staff Corps. He continued to serve with the Australian Staff Corps in the pre-war period under the service number 3166 but with the outbreak of war, he formally enlisted as VX38985 and was appointed as Battalion Adjutant to the freshly formed 2/29th Infantry Battalion to work alongside its commander, Lieutenant Colonel J.C. Robertson.



Left to right: Captain Morgan, Major Lloyd, Lieutenant Wastell. Seated: Lt Colonel Robertson MC VD Commanding Officer. (Robertson was killed in action at the Battle of Muar) Circa 1941.

The 2/29th Australian infantry battalion was formed in October 1940, mainly with volunteers recruited from Victoria. The battalion spent the end of 1940, and most of 1941 undergoing rigorous training, first at Bonegilla and later Bathurst. Amidst fears of a Japanese invasion of the Malayan peninsula, the 2/29th Battalion sailed from Sydney Harbour with 8th Division's 27th Brigade and arrived in Malaya on August 15th, 1941.

The battalion fought several delaying actions along the west coast, including fighting around Bakri and Muar, and in Johore, before the Allied forces withdrew across the causeway linking the Malayan Peninsula to Singapore.

The Battle of Muar was the last major battle of the Malayan Campaign. It took place from 14–22 January 1942 around Gemensah Bridge and the Muar River. The British



Left to Right: Captain Oliff, Lieutenant Wastell, Major Lloyd, Captain Brand, Captain Morgan. Taken on board troopship Marnix – August 1941.



Left to Right - Back - Captain Kemp, Captain Merton Morgan, Unknown, Front - Captain Bowring, Captain Gibson, Major Oliff Bathurst circa - 1941.

withdrew 240 kilometres south to Johore to rest and regroup, leaving it to the 8th Australian Division to stop the Japanese advance. The Australians inflicted severe losses on the Japanese at the Gemensah Bridge and in a second battle a few kilometres north of the town of Gemas.

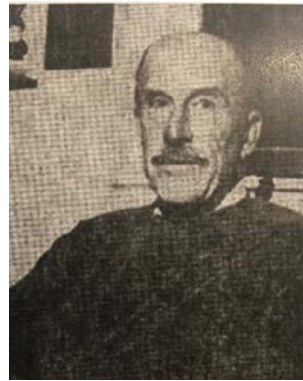
Members of the Australian 8th Division killed an estimated 600 personnel in the ambush at the bridge itself, whilst Australian anti-tank guns destroyed several Japanese tanks in the battle north of Gemas.

Although the ambush was successful for the Allies, the defence of Muar and Bakri on the west coast was a complete failure and heavy casualties were inflicted on its two Australian infantry battalions. The casualties of the Battalion in one week of fighting were 13 Officers killed or wounded and 296 other ranks killed or wounded, or 58% of those who went into action on January 17th.

During the short Malayan Campaign, Merton distinguished himself during the Battle of Muar when a large portion of the 2/29th Battalion became cut-off by the Japanese. An unidentified source on the internet site – reddit – stated:

"Comprising seven officers and 150 others in several groups, including Jats (Indian Brigade), they were eventually gathered together by the battalion's adjutant, Captain Morgan. Finding themselves isolated, they set off across country towards Yong Peng. Most of them eventually fell into Japanese hands."

Merton and his men were captured while attempting to make it toward allied lines. Initially, they were imprisoned at the overcrowded and unsanitary Pudu Gaol in Kuala Lumpur. They remained there until October 1942 when they were sent to Changi in Singapore to join the rest of the battalion. It was here that his family was made aware he was a POW and he was no longer considered 'missing'.



Merton Morgan at the CRB – circa late 1960s.

Merton remained in Changi for the next three years and survived his Japanese captivity, but many from his battalion did not, with 582 dying in the Malayan Campaign and subsequent Japanese imprisonment.

Merton's career in the army continued after the war. He was posted to Army Headquarters and remained in the military until 1967, when he retired aged 51 with the rank of Lieutenant Colonel.

Merton joined the CRB in the late 1960s. He worked in the Estates Section and eventually became the Assistant Estates Officer. Merton brought his military training to the fore – diligence, punctuality and pride in performance – and he was highly respected by his 'troops'. He was still inclined to use army technology: a 'group' was never assigned to do a job, it was always a 'detail'.

Merton retired in the late 1970s and he died in Launceston, Tasmania, in May 1993 at the age of 77.



And now for something beautiful

This is the last instalment of my tale of living in Lucca in Tuscany awaiting permission for me to fly home to Australia following an operation for a detached retina.



The Cathedral of San Martino in Lucca.

There are some other sites in Lucca that I visited that I must describe. Keep in mind, I have mentioned only a handful and I don't think I have fully conveyed to you the pleasure to be had from just strolling around and colliding with small gems. It might be a fountain or a plaque on a wall or, in the case of the 12th century Chiesa di San Salvatore, the wonderfully created lintel over the right door in an otherwise plain but elegant façade. It contains a luscious scene of a banquet with seventeen figures surrounded by a green and white arch.

An obvious place to start is the Piazza San Martino that connects to two other piazzas - San Giovanni and Antelminelli. This is a relatively small area near the southern edge of the wall but it contains the essence of Lucca. The cathedral is jammed in the south east corner of Piazza San Martino. There has been a church on this site since the sixth century but what we now see was built mainly between the 12th and 15th centuries. Stuck on to the façade, almost as an afterthought, is a statue of San Martino and the Poor

Man. Actually it is a concrete replica. The original – being too precious – was shifted inside.

The bell tower stands to the right of the main entrance and projects forward of the façade. The main building seems to press against the tower as a child would press into a mother's shoulder. This impression is further reinforced by the configuration of the three arches supporting the façade. The outer two are identical in size but the arch against the bell tower is only half the span of the other two. But it is hardly noticeable – I think because of the irregular shape of the piazza and the location of the building jammed into the corner.

The cathedral is approached at an angle and not from directly in front. This is a common artifice used throughout Lucca. In the piazzas, the axes of the streets are different to those of the buildings creating foreshortening effects that divert attention from the asymmetry of the buildings. The three arches of the façade form a veranda to the entrance of the cathedral that contains exquisite, sculptured panels

of a quality rivalling the baptismal font in the Basilica of San Frediano. The panels tell the story of San Martino and display the symbols of the Evangelists and the months of the year. The sculpture is stylized, confident and masterful with elegant folds in the garments of the characters depicted. It is impossible to find words that can describe these works – only the eye can appreciate them. They are simply wonderful.

Inside, the interior is a bit of a disappointment. It was very dark and a strange mixture of styles with pointed Gothic arches forming the vaulted ceiling. There was a garish depiction of the Last Supper by Tintoretto in which I counted one Jesus, twelve disciples, two serving maids – one is serving what looked to me to be a birthday cake with candles – four angels, twelve cherubs and in the foreground, a mother suckling a baby. I was always led to believe that the Last Supper was a bit short of rations but it really must have been quite a party.



Saint Martin and the beggar
– circa 1200



The main door of San Martino.

But there are two features inside that I want to mention. The first is considered to be the masterpiece of Italian funerary sculpture. It is the tomb of Ilaria del Carretto by Jacopo della Quercia. It is in white marble and shows a beautiful young woman fully dressed in the style of the day, asleep on her bed. A small dog nestles at her feet waiting for her to wake up providing a touch of domesticity. She looks absolutely gorgeous and a picture of good health – much nicer than poor old Zita over at San Frediano. I know it is not really “her” and the image may well flatter her, but I’m sure she would prefer being remembered this way than to be hauled out each year like poor old Zita.

But Ilaria was dogged by bad luck. In 1403, at 24 years of age, she married the local strong man, one Paolo Guingini. Two years later she died following the birth of her second child and when the sarcophagus that the so-called grieving Paolo had commissioned was finished in 1407, Paolo had just married – for the third time! I am elated to report that he was eventually overthrown as a tyrant. Serve him right if you ask me.

The second feature in the cathedral is a most elaborate sort of birdcage containing a wooden crucifix known as ‘The Holy Face’. It is not much as a work of art but the legend behind it ensures a high attendance of people pressing their curious noses against the grille to get a good look at it.

Now please don’t think I believe what is to follow, but the story goes like this. It was carved by Nicodemo into a cedar of Lebanon, but when he came to do the face of Christ, the angels took over and fashioned it themselves. I suppose you could call it the Hand of God. However, the crucifix was kept hidden for centuries. Then it was eventually put into a boat and sent out to sea in the pirate-infested Mediterranean – unaccompanied – where it miraculously found its way to shore at Luni – absolutely unharmed. In order to abide by the divine will as to its final destination, it was placed in a cart pulled by wild calves and they, of their own accord, towed it to Lucca.



The tomb of Ilaria del Carretto.

And now for something beautiful continued

Honestly, who do they think we are? However, regardless of the veracity of this story, good sense prevailed in the choice of Lucca as its final resting place.

Then all sorts of miracles started occurring. A poor minstrel unable to make an offering before the sacred image, decided to play a tune in front of it. It must have hit the right note because Jesus, moved to pity, gave him one of his slippers, by dropping it in front of him. The minstrel was caught with it not long afterwards and was accused of sacrilegious theft for which the punishment of the time wouldn't bear thinking about. However his innocence was proved by divine intervention and ever since a slipper is supported in a silver chalice within the small temple. No one appears to have thought of the possibility that Christ wanted the minstrel to shut up and aimed a kick at him losing his slipper in the process. The fame of its miracles spread throughout Europe. King William II of England used to swear "*per sanctum Vultum de Luca.*" I have no idea what it means, but it sounds impressive even though Lucca is misspelt.

It was barely 100 years ago that the church owned up that it was actually carved in the 11th century. Aren't they the limit keeping everyone in the dark for so long? Talking about "dark", the face of Christ is black and I thought that this was an interesting bit of ethnic honesty, but I read later that the blackening was caused by candle and incense smoke in the church. Every September, the crucifix is dressed up in a gold crown, tunic and collar and paraded through the streets with the whole town following in procession. It must be some sight.

There is also an excellent, small museum next to the cathedral displaying its treasures. Every item in it is fascinating and it covers all aspects of ecclesiastical life – art, vestments, music, illuminated manuscripts, tapestries, ornaments and jewellery. It is a small collection but every piece is perfect and the modern design of the museum and its presentation make it a pleasure to spend an afternoon there. Every piece has a story and, unlike the major museums of Italy, you can inspect each piece at close range and really appreciate the artistry and inspiration of their creators.

The other church I want to describe, and I promise this will be the last one, is the Basilica of San Giovanni and Santa Reparata that is positioned diagonally across the piazza from the cathedral. It is now a museum showing the successive developments that have occurred on this site since early Roman times. The interior is simple Romanesque with arches supported on Roman columns and a carved wooden ceiling. The relative absence of later additions preserves the airiness and simplicity of the original building. You can descend about three metres below the existing floor to see the original foundations of the Roman building. There are remnant mosaic floors with rich patterns of monsters, fish and abstract designs and elaborate drainage systems indicating that it was once the site of an ancient bath.

But what I loved most was the 10th century graffiti scratched into one of the walls. It tells the story of Santa Reparata who lived in Palestine and was beheaded in the 3rd century when she converted to Christianity. Here the story becomes a bit far-fetched and suspiciously similar to 'The Holy Face'. Perhaps Lucca specializes in these sorts of stories?

Her relics were shoved on a boat that was pushed out to sea with two angels protecting it from pirates and guiding it to Lucca. The graffiti shows the two angels carrying the head of Santa Reparata. A monster headed animal depicts the pirates and evil monsters of the Mediterranean and there are fish flapping about, as fish do. There is also a man bearing a Norman shield dressed in the costume of the day receiving the relics.

I looked at these naïve but artistic renderings on the wall and saw exactly what the graffitist saw when he created it a thousand years ago. It is as if I were looking over his shoulder, perhaps keeping a watch-out for a clerical inspector. We should be thankful that this graffitist was not caught.

There is no moral to this tale of exploration of Lucca except that if you ever need to have an operation in Italy, I recommend that you pop up there and enjoy yourself.

Trivia and didactic whimsies

The Artist of Changi

You will notice that the paintings depicting the prisoners of in Lest We Forget above war were all the work of Murray Griffin. He is the only official Australian War Artist who was captured and held as a prisoner of war.

As a prisoner, he continued his intended work by capturing life in Changi. He was an officer and his status spared him from working in enforced labour gangs. He produced over 40 paintings and 150 drawings and, although the Japanese did not actively object to him continuing his work, towards the end of the war he hid most of his work to ensure that they were not confiscated. He created brushes and paints from materials scrounged outside the camp by members of the work parties. After the declaration of peace, he went to Thailand to record the appalling treatment of the emaciated prisoners struggling to survive malnutrition and disease.



Griffin also did a pencil portrait of Paddy O'Donnell who was a prisoner in Changi. Ian (Paddy) O'Donnell was Chairman of the CRB from 1963 to 1971. The portrait (shown here) is in the collection of the Australian War Memorial.

Jewelry vs Jewellery

When writing about the Museum in Lucca (above), I referred to 'jewellery'. However, it looked a bit odd so I decided to check it out. For those who love jewellery, one of the most confusing elements is how to spell it correctly. I found out that 'jewelry' and 'jewellery' are both correct spellings.

"England and America, two countries separated by a common language" George Bernard Shaw.

When Shaw uttered those immortal words, he had no idea how close to the truth of the matter he was. English is the most widely spoken language on earth. British English is the dominant variation. But we also have American English that is unique to North America or most of it - depending on where you are in Canada,

The simple answer is that both spellings are correct. Jewelry is how people in the USA and Canada spell it. Jewellery is how people in the UK (and most of the rest of the English-speaking world) spell it.

Apologies for these frightful puns

John Travolta tested negative for coronavirus last night. Turns out it was just Saturday night fever.

The World Health Organization (WHO) has announced that dogs cannot contract Covid-19. Dogs previously held in quarantine can now be released. To be clear, WHO let the dogs out.

Intelligence is like underwear. It is important that you have it, but not necessary that you show it off.

Relationships are a lot like algebra. Have you ever looked at your X and wondered Y?

A courtroom artist was arrested today for an unknown reason. Details are sketchy.

Whatever you do, always give 100%, unless you're donating blood.

What did Snow White say when she came out of the photo booth? Someday my prints will come.

A girl said she recognized me from her vegetarian club, but I'd never met herbivore.

I've finally told my suitcases there will be no holiday this year. Now I'm dealing with the emotional baggage.

If you're not supposed to eat at night, why is there a light bulb in the refrigerator?

Don't let your worries get the best of you; remember, Moses started out as a basket case.

Pesky critters

The Presbyterian church called a meeting to decide what to do about their possum infestation. After much prayer and consideration, they concluded that the possums were predestined to be there, and they should not interfere with God's divine will.

At the Baptist church, the possums had taken an interest in the baptistery. The deacons met and decided to put a water-slide in the baptistery and let the possums drown themselves. The possums loved the slide and, unfortunately, knew instinctively how to swim, so twice as many possums showed up the following week.

The Lutheran church decided that they were not in a position to harm any of God's creatures. So, they humanely trapped their possums and set them free near the Baptist church. Two weeks later, the possums were back when the Baptists took down the water-slide.

The Episcopalians tried a much more innovative path by setting out pans of whiskey around their church in an effort

Trivia and didactic whimsies continued

to kill the possums with alcohol poisoning. They sadly learned how much damage a band of drunk possums can do.

But the Catholic church came up with a more creative strategy! They baptized all the possums and made them members of the church. Now they only see the possums at Christmas and Easter.

At the Jewish synagogue, they took the first possum and circumcised him. They haven't seen a possum since.

Loose gravel?



A moral tale

An elderly couple was celebrating their sixtieth anniversary. The couple had married as childhood sweethearts and had moved back to their old neighbourhood after they retired. Holding hands, they walked back to their old school. It was not locked, so they entered, and found the old desk they'd shared, where Jerry had carved "I love you, Sally".

On their way back home, a bag of money fell out of an armoured car, practically landing at their feet. Sally quickly picked it up and, not sure what to do with it, they took it home. There, she counted the money – fifty thousand dollars!

Jerry said, "We've got to give it back."

Sally said, "Finders keepers." She put the money back in the bag and hid it in their attic.

The next day, two police officers were canvassing the neighbourhood looking for the money, and knocked on their door. "Pardon me, did either of you find a bag that fell out of an armoured car yesterday?"

Sally said, "No."

Jerry said, "She's lying. She hid it up in the attic."

Sally said, "Don't believe him, he's getting senile."

The agents turned to Jerry and began to question him.

One said: "Tell us the story from the beginning."

Jerry said, "Well, when Sally and I were walking home from school yesterday"...

The first police officer turned to his partner and said, "We're outta here!"

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