

ANZAC Centenary

Recently the Government called for submissions and ideas on ways in which Australia could commemorate the ANZAC Centenary. Six themes were identified, they were:

Century of service;

Community engagement;

Infrastructure and capital works;

Education, public awareness and community access;

Commemorative services, and

International relations and cooperation.



The RSL Club provided a submission which embraces the first three of the themes. The Club's submission relates to the Refurbishment and Upgrading of the Memorial Hall.

The Commission received 196 submissions in all and of those 24 came from Queensland. It is not known when the National Commission will advise the outcome of the submissions but we will be keeping our fingers crossed and will be hoping that the Commission asks the Club for further details and costs etc.

Beech Grove' Retirement Community Cooroy

Between 2005 and 2007, RSL Care land banked 12 hectares in Cooroy to develop 'Beech Grove' Retirement Community at a time in the future. The development is master planned to include 120 residential aged care places and 179 independent living villas with resort style leisure facilities.

We are pleased to report that the Development Approval (DA) for Beech Grove Retirement Community has been received from Council. This is a significant milestone with any development and puts RSL Care in a good position to commence construction of this Retirement Community when the time is right.

We continue to keep a close eye on the overall performance of the economy throughout the global financial downturn; setting our project timings so that we can be confident of the viability of each project.

Once we are confident the economy is restored, the next step is to seek Operational Works Approval from Council to commence civil and earth works on the site.

At this stage we are still targeting a commencement date for Beech Grove post July 2011 as previously indicated.

However, this timing is dependent on the state of the economy and the real estate market.

An artists' impression of Beech Grove Retirement Community which is indicative of the design planned for the site is attached for your interest.

We look forward to delivering news of commencement dates once these become available. For more information about RSL Care retirement communities and services in 28 locations throughout Queensland and New South Wales, visit www.rslcare.com.au or phone 07 3251 6200.

NEWSFLASH – special offer for DVA card holders at Tantula Rise – Alexandra Headland.

Purchase and settle your brand new two bedroom retirement apartment at Tantula Rise Retirement Community before 30 June 2011 and if you are a DVA card holder, you will receive a \$10,000 cash rebate.

Retirement apartments are now priced from just \$280,000 in the heart of the Sunshine Coast. Please direct all enquiries for Tantula Rise to Jane Rankin on 07 5430 1458.

Veteran in Profile

WILLIAM CHARLES CARREE

ROYAL ENGINEER

RAT OF TOBRUK

CHINDIT

Charles was born into a hop farming family in Kent, UK, in 1921 - the second oldest of 7 children in times when there was little possibility of further study. A trip to Belgium to a Scout Jamboree gave him a taste for travel and so when the opportunity came, he joined the Regular army at 17 – going to Chatham where Royal Engineers were enlisted and training near Canterbury. He vividly remembers this time – living under canvas, marching endlessly with heavy back packs and training on the River Medway to construct floating bridges. As a “sapper” (the nick name for REs) he was also trained in the deactivation of antitank mines, detonators and explosives. After graduation his company sailed on a coal fired ship to the Middle East, landing in Cairo where a hundred sappers reinforced the 2nd Field Company of R.Es to bring them up to war strength. The whole company then was sent to Mersa Matruh (also in Egypt) to build concrete pill boxes and underground Division Headquarters. At this time the Arabs in Libya, around Bengazi, Tobruk and Bardia and as far as the Egyptian border, were fighting the Italians who had tried to settle North Africa. On 1st September, 1939, the troops were called out of bed to be told War had been declared. Immediately the 2nd Field Company was put on active service footing, continuing their construction until the Italians joined Germany in the war. The Italians advanced from Libya into Egypt stopping at Sidi Barrani where in time the British Army engaged them in the first battle in the North Africa. Charles was attached to the Guards Brigade in his capacity as an engineer to locate Italian laid anti tank mines. General Wavell was in charge and he came up with a surprise plan to fool the Italians into thinking that the British army was far larger than it was. He had dummy tanks, men and guns placed out overnight at the front line, with active infantry, tanks and gunners placed between and so when the main surprise attack came from behind the Italians were fooled into thinking they were greatly outnumbered and so they simply surrendered... by the thousands. Charles laughs as he tells how he was put in charge of guarding hundreds of Italians who just wanted to go home. There wasn't enough transport so they had to walk to hurriedly built prisoner of war compounds in Mersa Matruh. They were eventually disbursed into prisoner of war camps around the world.

After fighting commenced the 6th and 7th Division of the Australian Army joined the action in North Africa and Charles was with the advance to Bardia with the 2nd Field Company and then he was attached to the Kings Dragoon Guards doing long range desert patrols in armoured cars observing what was going on and reporting back to Division Headquarters. The advance with the Australians went from Bardia to Tobruk, with Tobruk being taken. The Italians retreated right back to Bengazi and Tripoli with the British and Australians in pursuit. The Australian 9th division took over and the 6th div going to Greece and the 7th to Syria to fight the Vichy French. As Germany was very short of oil, Hitler needed to take all of North Africa with one aim being to open the way to the oilfields in Iraq and Iran. Hitler decided that Rommel would bring German Troops into North Africa to reinforce the depleted Italian army. The German armaments were far superior and the Brits and Aussie troops retreated to Tobruk. So started the siege of Tobruk. The Rats of Tobruk were so named by Lord Haw Haw (a British traitor) because of the way the troops had to live in defence holes (like rats) dug in the desert sand. For 8 months the troops were pounded by the Germans and Charles was constantly doing bomb disposal and laying defences of anti tank mines to the BLUE LINE which was the second line of defence and he was often stationed on the Red line at the side of the Bardia Rd. He'd observe where the mines were being laid during the day taking the position by compass and then at night he'd go out and locate them, bring them back and pull them apart to see how they were put together. The German Stukas and Panther Tanks were continually pounding the combined troops. Many of Charles RE comrades lost their lives “delousing” land mines and unexploded bombs, and so he counts himself very lucky to have survived to this point. He was attached to the 32nd Army Tank Brigade during the siege and when the break out took place he crawled in front of the tanks picking up anti tank mines in front of them to break into the German defences. On the first day of the break out, Charles was awarded a 'Mention in Dispatches' for his bravery during this excessively heavy combat action.

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The Germans were still scattered through the desert and at Eduda the Australian Second 13th Battalion (left behind in Tobruk as their boat was bombed) was called in to reinforce the fierce fighting. Here Charles was called on to join the infantry in more hand to hand combat. When the 8th army advanced the Germans went into retreat to Bengazi and Charles rejoined the 2nd Field Company lifting German anti tank mines they 'd laid in defensive positions round the perimeter of Tobruk. In December of 1941 Charles' Company, part of the British 70th Infantry Division, was sent to build a road into Mt Herman which is in Syria, but during 1942 before it was completed they were sent back into Egypt and embarked the troop ship New Amsterdam to sail to Singapore. Can you imagine the culture shock between fighting in the desert, sleeping in dugouts and then boarding a ship with stewards and BEDS? He said it felt like heaven! When the ship docked in Aden they heard Singapore had fallen to the Japanese and so the ship was diverted to Ceylon where his brigade began jungle warfare training in preparation for fighting the Japanese. When they arrived in Ceylon they were stationed inside the centre of the island in case the Japanese did attack and with such small numbers of British troops they could have been easily over-run. In April 1942 a Japanese task force sailed around the island and both Colombo and Trinkamalee were bombed. Charles was deployed to prepare to blow up a railway bridge close to Trincomalee to thwart the Japanese if they did land. Fortunately they didn't, much to the brigade's relief as they would have been severely outnumbered. This is how Charles spent his 21st Birthday...waiting for a Japanese Invasion. He recalls that the worst part was that there was no beer to celebrate with. Charles recalled that there were quite a few light moments during their 10 months there. He was demonstrating to some officers how to prepare trees to be felled across roads to make road blocks – not knowing that a family of deadly snakes lived amongst the roots. Some were killed, but one actually chased him. He high tailed it to a truck which had its tailgate still closed and to this day he doesn't know how managed to clear it to get out of the snake's way. In February General Wingate came looking for Engineers and Signallers to join him on the first exploratory expedition into Burma to see if it would be possible to get a large army behind Japanese lines and fight them from two fronts. Charles was selected and he left Ceylon and travelled by train to Bopal in Northern India to continue training. This involved constant route marches and swimming with full packs across rivers as the route into Burma was to be all on foot. Charles said that if he thought that Tobruk was bad, Burma was hell on earth. The men became known as "Wingates Chindits". Burma's terrain as very rugged and footholds had to be hacked into the sides of the steep hills to enable the donkeys carrying all the heavy equipment and supplies to continue. Guides from local tribes helped the forward Scouts from the three columns of about 1000 men each headed by Ord Wingate, Mike Calvert and Bernard Ferguson, to locate Japanese positions. They were formed into long range penetration groups trained to operate deep behind the Japanese lines. Most of the members of the Chindits were from units of the British and Gurkha units of the British Indian Army.

The aim was to avoid the enemy if possible but when food and medical supplies were parachuted in by Dakotas more often than not the Japanese army benefited, leaving the Brits hungry and ill-equipped. Very soon their boots were rotting away and the Japanese troops beat the Brits to the boot drop too. Charles said his boots were more holes than boot. Encounters with the enemy claimed many lives, but the biggest problem was hunger and disease as the troops were always wet from the monsoon rains. They dug up bamboo shoots and boiled them in their mess tins but the water more often than not came from dirty streams. They also had to cook rice in their mess tins and to this day after leaving India, not one grain of rice has crossed his lips as he remembers the slosh that was often their only food for the day. They had water purifying tablets but these certainly didn't do the job expected and so many contaminants remained in the water. Many of their men died of typhus fever, malaria and dysentery. Charles said in his column more troops died from illness than from engaging with the enemy. They evaded action with the enemy as much as they could as the object of the exercise was to find a way into Burma for the 14th army. In Charles' column the infantry men were mainly Gurkhas who were extremely brave fighters. By the time Charles' column reached the Irrawaddi River and were ordered back to India their numbers were greatly depleted. He had contracted two types of malaria and had recurring bouts of dysentery which he had initially contracted in the North Africa. Wingates' column crossed the Irrawaddi and Charles' column spit up into smaller groups and started the long walk back to India. He lost track of how long he was in Burma as he became very ill with the malaria and malnourishment. The worst part for him was having to leave his extremely ill comrades behind when they were too weak to carry on and the other troops too ill themselves to carry them. This is the hell he remembers so clearly but he remembers just blurs of the following months and to this day doesn't know how he managed to survive. He

lost three and a half stone in the few months he was there and struggled to swim the Chindwin River to get back into India. Once back over the border he was hospitalized in Calcutta with 2 types of malaria – a very sick man indeed. Sleeping out without shelter, drinking contaminated water, lack of food and medical supplies were elements endured not only by the men in Burma, but also the men of the Australian and New Zealand armies, as they fought the war on other fronts, and often these conditions caused as many deaths as combat.

Charles spent months in hospital in Calcutta before being sent to a hospital in Darjeeling in the foothills of the Himalayas, along with other sick personnel, hoping the cooler climate there would relieve the effects of those suffering from malaria. From here he was sent to Dulali to a convalescent camp while he waited to return to the UK, and it was here that his mail finally caught up with him – several months after being posted in the UK. While stationed in Ceylon Charles had started writing to his friend's fiancée's sister, Doris, and so when the mail finally caught up with him he was able to tell her and his family that he was going to be shipped home on the troop ship The Empire Brent. They sailed back to Glasgow through the Mediterranean and he was placed into St Mary's barracks before being given 30 days disembarkation leave, after five and a half years active service. He travelled by overnight train to Kent recalling that he travelled in the guard's van as the train was full and he saw thousands of planes and gliders pass over head. He was amazed at the number and then heard on the news that they were headed to Arnhem. This operation was called "Market Garden" and has gone down in history as one of the War's biggest blunder. This raid was disastrous as many aircrew lost their lives. During this leave he met up with Doris who travelled by train from Birmingham where she was the sister in charge of the night shift at Blackwell Military Hospital. When his leave finished he had to report to Hastings hospital as he was still ill with malaria but when we got there it was discovered that his medical records had gone missing. This placed him in no man's land and so until further notice all he had to do was sleep at the hospital and report to the matron every morning, then he caught the bus back to his home.

After some weeks he was posted to Halifax for a brief period before being sent on a course to Siemens Electrical Company in London. Here he was trained as an electrical cable jointer – the trade he followed for most of his life. He married Doris and was sent to Taunton in Somerset where he was placed in charge of supervising gangs of prisoner of war tradesmen who were involved in reconstruction. He was doing this when war ended and on the day of the announcement he took all the prisoners back to barracks and then joined American servicemen who'd been working locally, at the local pub and between them all they drank it dry!!!! He was discharged as "medically unfit under the Kings Rules and Regulations". The day he left the army he had to hand his uniform and tack in and was supplied with a suit from a huge warehouse – his only clothes. Although the malaria was still a major problem, he commenced work with Siemens until advised that he wouldn't be rid of the disease until he left freezing England and moved to a warmer climate.

On April 1 1948 he, along with Doris and their daughter who was two at this time, caught a train back to Glasgow and boarded The Empire Brent again but this time to sail to Australia. The ship was still in the configuration of a troop carrier and so to accommodate all the other immigrants, it was women on one deck and men on the other! They travelled from Sydney to Brisbane on the overnight train and spend some days at Yungabar Migrants Hostel – near the Story Bridge. Here they met up with Doris' uncle and travelled together by train to his farm in Eudlo to start their new life. To this day the effects of the malaria and damage from dysentery linger on and the legacy of five and a half years service around the equator is now terminal melanoma skin cancer. When asked what he felt about his service he said he felt he lost a huge chunk of his life, but on the other hand he felt proud that he'd played an important part in keeping the world free of the "terror of evil men". Tears form in his eyes as he recalls mates lost and left behind and he wants their families to know that what they all endured for freedom and what they achieved should remain in the minds of generations to come as a reminder that freedom and justice is worth fighting for. But then he adds that maybe the war prepared him to fight the biggest fight of all: Fighting to have his acquired injuries recognized as being war related. This year, at age 89, the British Government awarded him a full war related disability pension (no TPI for British Vets in Australia although he is an Australian Citizen and has lived here since 1948). This battle with the authorities started at his discharge date in 1947! The longest battle of all.

