



Royal Australian Armoured
Corps Association Inc.
(Victorian Branch)

TRACK

September 2020



Advance Australia

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Cambrai Dinner Done For 2020



CO/CI School of Armour Lt Col Josh Gilman, addressed the 2018 Cambrai Dinner

For the first time in a generation, our annual **Cambrai Dinner will not be** celebrated this year. As a result of the draconian conditions we are currently enjoying and following consultation with the PMC of the RAAC Officers Mess, we decided **that this year's dinner was not viable**. The tradition to celebrate the Battle of Cambrai each year on the nearest Saturday to 20 November originated in the 1950's. Since that time various venues have been utilised including: The Victoria Hotel Melbourne, Richmond F.C. Social Club, 4/19PWLH RHQ and Sergeants Mess, Clunies Ross House Parkville, the Jacka Club Puckapunyal, DSG Sergeants Mess Puckapunyal and since 1996 our present home at the RAAC Officers/Sergeants Mess. Next year we will celebrate the 75th birthday of our association and are planning to conduct some significant activities. **We have some making up to do!**

The Significance of Cambrai Day and the Royal Tank Corps to the RAAC

20 Nov 1917

As the 103rd anniversary of this ground-breaking event is almost upon us and **we are unable to celebrate and remember the battle in our traditional way**; we will revisit, courtesy of Major John Baines RFD (Retd), the RAAC Historian, some brief thoughts on this momentous time in military history.

The Battle of Cambrai is the foundation event on which the heritage of the Royal Tank Corps is built. The RAAC shares this heritage because of our close association with the Royal Tank Corps from the inception of our own tank units in 1930 and the later Australian Armoured Corps (AAC). The black beret, the mud, blood green fields colour patch and silver uniform accoutrements are testament to this relationship first ordained with the presentation of the model silver MK V tank when the Australian Tank Corps became the first Dominion unit to be granted affiliation with the Royal Tank Corps.

20 Nov 1917 Cambrai Day. The First Effective Mass Use of Armoured Vehicles In Warfare

At 5 am on 20 November 1917, tanks crossed the British trenches and entered no man's land at the start of the Battle of Cambrai. **Brigadier General Sir Hugh Elles** led the British tanks into action on the Western Front in what was to be the first effective mass use of armoured vehicles in warfare. Over 400 tanks took part in the attack, beginning the penetration of the German lines to a depth of 10,000 yards on a frontage of 13,000 yards.

Eight thousand prisoners and 100 guns were taken.

The anniversary of the battle is celebrated each year by the Armoured Corps in recognition of its significance

BATTLE OF CAMBRAI

“The Motor Machine Gun Section was formed on 16 Feb and continued during April and May consisting initially of 184 Officers and 1610 Other Ranks. Training started at Bisley with what were then called LANDSHIPS and consisted of Infantry Training, Signalling and the mastering of the Vickers Machine Gun and the smaller Hotchkiss, fed by strips of ammunition. The gunnery side was under the control of the Navy at HMS Excellent, Whale Island. The name was later changed to Heavy Section Machine Gun Corps on 16 May 1917.

As Landships became available, training proceeded at the estate of Lord Iveagh Elvedon, near Thetford during June of 1916. Driving instruction was on the Mk1 with two big wheels trailing behind, for the purpose of assisting in the steering where only a slight turn was required. Many were painted with Russian lettering said to mean ...'Water Tank, Retrograd', thus the name 'Tank' was born! By 30 Aug 16, 50 tanks of the C and D Company had arrived in France.

In January **Lt Col H.J. Elles** was in command and on 18 Nov 16 the four companies became A,B,C and D Battalions and five further new battalions were forming from the remaining companies E and F and on 28 Jun 17 the HSMGC became the Tank Corps.

On the eve of the Battle of Cambrai, Brig Gen H.J. Elles composed the famous “Special Order No 6”

SPECIAL ORDER, NO. 6

1. Tomorrow the Tank Corps will have the chance for which it has been waiting for many months, to operate on good going in the van of the battle.
2. All that hard work and ingenuity can achieve has been done in the way of preparation.
3. It remains for unit commanders and for tank crews to complete the work by judgement and pluck in the battle itself.
4. In the light of past experience I leave the good name of the Corps with great confidence in your hands.
5. I propose leading the attack of the Centre Division.

HUGH ELLES

B-G,

Commanding Tank Corps

19th Nov, 1917

Distribution to Tank Commanders”

This message was read out by every tank commander to his crew that night. By 5am on Tue 20 Nov 1917 all the tanks were in position and the Infantry started to cut their own wire. The sky was grey and overcast and there was a fine ground mist. The tanks were about 500 yards behind the British Front Line and at 6am the crews crawled into their vehicles ready for zero hour which was 6.20am and were then in another world. The face masks were donned with chain mail hanging down so as to protect the lower part of the face from red hot metal which might fly about inside the tanks once heavy machine gun fire was encountered. The only light was from a festoon lamp; nothing could be seen outside nor even heard. They were in an eerie silence with but the cooing of the three carrier pigeons for company. Through tiny slits the tanks on either side could be observed. Soon after 6am Brig Gen Elles appeared in the centre of the line. He chose his tank, *Hilda*, mounted, and in seconds his head and shoulders appeared through the manhole at the top, his brown, red and green colours attached to an ash plant proudly fluttered in the slight breeze. As the tanks rolled into action he was still to be seen in this position.

At 6.10am the tanks crossed the British front line trenches and as they crossed no man's land at zero hour the thousand guns of the artillery opened up with a devastating crash and roar. From the sky swept the 14 Squadrons of the Royal Flying Corps flying low and spraying the German trenches with machine gun fire; and so at last the Tank Corps got the chance for which it had been waiting and preparing for as the Battle for Cambrai began. From left to right the line swept ever onward except for the key village of Flesquires, the key to Bourlon Wood. By nightfall an advance of five miles had been made. Eight thousand German prisoners had been taken with over 100 heavy guns, 280 machine guns and about 80 trench mortars and a huge gap had been ripped in the German defences.

In London the news was greeted with great jubilation and church bells were ordered to be rung. The tanks had proved their worth, but at a cost. By nightfall on the 20 Nov, 179 tanks lay out of action; twisted from direct hits, broken down or ditched in the great trenches. Most of the others had been in continuous action for all of 16 hours and were sorely in need of maintenance and replenishment.

The pre-battle cooperation between the tanks and the infantry, for the first phase had paid off but the tank crews, survivors of the first phase, tired and in need of rearming, refuelling and maintenance, to say nothing of rest, reorganisation, reconnaissance and further planning, were exhausted. It has been said that the Tank Corps suffered from the inferiority of its equipment, no doubt aggravated by the carrying of fascines, the width of the trenches encountered and the shortage of reserve equipment. We must not lose sight of the fact, however, that this was a young Corps, finding its way and aside of this, it is generally acknowledged that the Corps gained a resounding victory, never to be forgotten.

Infantry reserves were virtually non-existent for the reason that they lay dead in Flanders Fields but there were still the five cavalry divisions with thousands of fresh horsemen who were now presented with the opportunity for which they had cried out. The wire was destroyed, the trenches crossed and the machine gun posts and many of the bridges cleared, but there was no sign of the cavalry.

They did not cross the British Line until 12.30 and when they got to the lines now occupied by British troops they halted and dismounted to await fresh orders and there they remained. Had they pushed on, the result might have been different, but the command was following the old trench warfare methods and by the time fresh orders came, the Germans had reoccupied the trenches from which they had so unceremoniously been ejected but a little time before. Had the cavalry not halted they could possibly have reached Cambrai in but 2 to 3 hours as had been planned.

Brig Gen H.J. Elles' Force Consisted of:

476 tanks – 378 of which were fighting tanks. These tanks came from the 1st, 2nd and 3rd Brigades and were from A,B,C,D,E,F,G,H and I Battalions. Of the fighting tanks 252 of the 2nd and 3rd Brigades went to 3rd Corps and the remaining 126 to 4th Corps.

The tanks from each battalion were divided into waves, each wave into a definite unit with a specifically allotted task. Two thirds therefore planned to tackle the first objective and then to aim for the second objective. Special details were nominated to secure bridges over the Canal du Nord to ensure the unhindered passage of the pursuing cavalry for exploitation and mopping up of the expected morale shattered Germans. In addition the wire was to be breached principally to assist the passage of the cavalry, reinforcements and supply caravans.

Nine days after the commencement of the Battle of Cambrai, what was left of the three tank brigades, lined up in Havrincourt for an inspection by General Elles, but the cost had been immense. The Corps had lost 188 officers and 965 other ranks and almost half their tanks.

From January 1918 the system of lettered battalions was dropped in favour of numbered battalions. Thus A became 1 and B became 2, etc. The Mk IV Tank having given sterling service was now being replaced by the Mk V. On 17 Oct 1919, King George V became Colonel-in-Chief and in 1924 the Tank Corps became the Royal Tank Corps. This name was to survive until 1938 when it was changed to the Royal Tank Regiment.”

Maj Gen R.N.L. Hopkins: Cambrai as an important landmark in tactical employment of armour

“There have been many detailed accounts of the battle. Australians did not participate, and there seems no further reason to describe it. The importance of the event as a landmark in the tactical employment of armour however needs emphasis. The remarkable success of the tanks when the principles of surprise and concentration were allied to the use of suitable terrain pointed the way to the end of trench warfare and ultimate victory over the Germans. Nearly 500 tanks were employed in various roles and complete surprise was achieved. By midday on 20 November a deeper penetration had been made in a shorter time than in any previous offensive since the beginning of trench warfare. Moreover organised opposition on the immediate front had disappeared.

“The fact of the matter seems to have been that the lessons of tank operations at Cambrai and in the final battles of 1918 were neglected or, perhaps, not fully understood. In spite of the steady improvement in tank design and writings of Fuller, Liddell Hart, and many others, there was no initiative in Australia towards a study of the subject, even after the first medium tanks had arrived in 1927. This was almost certainly due to the fact that no senior officer was tank trained. The only moves made by Army Headquarters were on too small a scale to impress either soldier or politician and remained isolated because of a failure to build on the foundation which had been laid. The old joke that every army prepares for the next war in terms of the last seems only too true.”

Maj Gen R.N.L. Hopkins relates the Australian tradition of commemorating the Battle of Cambrai:

“Each year on 20 November, the anniversary of the Battle of Cambrai, 1st Tank Section [formed in 1929] paraded at the Cenotaph in Sydney where a short memorial service was held in keeping with the tradition of the Royal Tank Corps.”



Another enduring and significant part of our annual Cambrai celebrations is the memorial service conducted in the Army Tank Museum's World War II Armoured Memorial on the Saturday afternoon of the dinner. It was originally convened by our friends from Sydney, Kevin 'Bunny' Austin and Doug Spinney of 2/6th Australian Armoured Regiment, and has more recently been expanded to include all the WWII armoured units. Pictured above is the Corps' Historian Major John Baines, RFD conducting the service at the Divisional Cavalry Memorial.

From the Archives.....



(Andy Clark)

A classic shot from 1971, a 4/19PWLH APC negotiating a dry gully on the Puckapunyal Training Area. Hanging on grimly is **Honorary Life Member, the late Tom Murphy**. Must have been a wet night previously as evidenced by the blankets drying out on the cargo hatch!

We Gratefully Acknowledge the Following Donors

Peter Swinfield Niall Waring

Welcome to the Crew

W.W. Houston Dot Brennan Mark Montague Graham Douglas

Congratulations to one of our members

on receipt of the Bravery Medal for his service in the Victoria Police, described in the award as Officer A

The Arch Finlayson Memorial Scholarship

Application Form

Applicants for the Arch Finlayson Memorial Scholarship must complete this form and mail to the address detailed below. **The Scholarship is available to children and grandchildren of financial members. They must be 1st year apprentices and the scholarship is valued at \$500.00.**

Name:
(Christian name/names) (Surname)

Address:
..... Post Code:

Telephone.....

What is your apprenticeship?:

Employer:

Employer's Address:
..... Post Code:

Contact Phone Number:

Registered Training Institute or TAFE:

Name of Financial RAACA Victorian Member:

Address:
..... Post Code:

Contact Phone Number:

You will need to enclose copies of the following:

1. A brief supportive resume.
2. A copy of signed training agreement.
3. A copy of your enrolment at a registered training institute or TAFE.
4. A supporting letter from your employer.

After your application has been received, the three trustees of the fund may require you to attend an interview at a time, date and location to be advised.

Return this form together with all supporting documents to:

The Trustees

Arch Finlayson Memorial Scholarship Fund

RAACA – Victorian Branch

1 Ambleside Link

Doreen Vic 3754

Latest Finlayson Memorial Scholarship Presented



Young Leon Pudebat is the latest recipient of an Arch Finlayson Memorial Scholarship

Leon is the grandson of members **Vin and Dot Brennan**. Along with his twin brother Max and older brother Sean; were regular attendees at our functions. The boys had a great interest in their Grandfather's Army service and a particular love for the Army Tank Museum. Leon's apprenticeship with Remodel Melbourne has so far covered all types of carpentry work including decking, extensions, pergolas, frames and fit outs. **The \$500.00 scholarship will be used for the purchase of carpentry tools.**

Mark Your Diary.....

2020 Kid's Christmas Party

Sunday 13 December 2020

1030 hrs

Rod Westgarth has booked **Meadmore Junction** again for this year's party at the **Diamond Valley Miniature Railway**. God willing (and COVID) we are praying that we will be able to get back to some degree of normalcy by then!! Come along and enjoy the fun and the bar-b-que at **this premier location in Eltham**.

Victorian Branch Birthday

Sunday 7 February 2021

1400 hrs

The 75th birthday of the Victorian Branch will be celebrated at the **Shrine of Remembrance on Sunday 7 February 2021 (our actual birthday)** with a gathering on the forecourt of the Shrine followed by a **short commemorative service** in the **Shrine Sanctuary** and afterwards the **usual sumptuous afternoon tea** will be enjoyed in the **western annex where the Shrine shop is located**.

Our association flag, first flown in February 2014 will be flying from the flagpole in the Shrine forecourt. It is flown there on appropriate days during the year including **7 February (association birthday 1946) and 9 July (official Australian Armoured Corps birthday 1941)**.

All members and spouses are strongly urged to support this significant activity. The setting, in Melbourne's most famous landmark is outstanding and the opportunity to **renew your acquaintance with this significant Melbourne precinct is strongly encouraged**.

To assist the organisers with afternoon tea catering, please contact the Secretary Peter Axton by email secretary.raacavic@gmail.com or 0428 335 406 to warn in for rations. **RSVP 29 January 2021**.





Show Off Your Association

RAACA Q Store Order Form

Please contact the Property Member, Daryl Pinner to confirm availability prior to placing order. Ph: 03 9359 4520 Email: daryl.pinner@yahoo.com.au

	Size	Colour/ Sleeve	Qty	Price each	Postage	Cost
Tie, RAACA				\$32.00	\$4.00	
Pocket Badge RAACA				\$15.00	\$1.00	
Plaque RAACA				\$50.00	\$10.00	
Decal (External) RAACA				\$1.50	\$1.00	
Decal (Internal) RAACA				\$1.50	\$1.00	
Lapel Badge, RAACA				\$12.00	\$1.00	
Cap, RAACA				\$10.00	\$6.00	
Stubby Holder, RAACA				\$6.50	\$4.00	
Brew Mug, RAACA				\$10.00	Pick-up Only	
Beret, black				\$30.00	\$6.00	
(Please insert beret size - S, M, L, XL)						
Polo Shirt, RAACA				\$25.00	\$6.00	
(Insert Size: L, XL, 2XL) (Insert Colour: Black, Green, Burgundy, Navy Blue)						
Rugby Top, long sleeve, RAACA				\$35.00	\$6.00	
(Insert Size: L, XL, 2XL) (Style: Navy Blue with denim collar, long sleeves & Association Logo)						
Chambray Shirt, RAACA		Long / Short		\$29.00	\$6.00	
(Please enter size: L, XL, 2XL, 3XL & mark Sleeve Length)						
(Style: Long or Short Sleeves, light blue with Association Logo)						
Eldridge Book (Special price)				\$30.00	Postage Paid	

Refer to the website (<https://raacavic.weebly.com/>) for photos of these items

Member Details:		Total Cost	\$
Name:			
Address:			
Contact Number:			
If paying by cheque, post payment to:			<input type="checkbox"/>
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	Bank: Bendigo Bank		
	BSB: 633 000 Acc. No.: 163760515		<input type="checkbox"/>
	Include your name and something to identify payment like "Q Store"		



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PLEASE USE BLOCK LETTERS (EXCEPT FOR E-MAIL)