NOTICE TO MARINERS

Newsletter 32 Small Ship Squadron Association Incorporating RAE Tn

Patron: Colonel K.L. Duncan (Rtd)

President's Message

Over the last two months we have Charlie Bawden, Murray Neville thank those Association members farewelled three shipmates being and Roger MacDonald. I would like to who attended the funerals.

A special mention must be given to caring of Charlie over those last few Kevin and Lynn Morley for their months and keeping the committee informed. My thanks to Gary, Jeff Freeland's grandson for being Ross and my chauffeur to and from Albury Airport enabling us to participate in the wake at the Court House Hotel in Howlong.

Murray's funeral was a celebration of his life which included three grandsons participating musically in the service . The musical instruments included the didgeridoo, the clarinet and a sterling last post by Timothy Neville on the trumpet.

Roger had been a friend of mine for 46 years since joining the Army Apprentices School in 1962. His life also was celebrated with eulogies from the Association, his friends from the Australian Merchant Navy and his golfing buddies. Gail also paid a moving tribute to her life with Roger. A special mention must be made of DJ's camaraderie to Roger over his final days. Although under such sad circumstances it was great to meet up with those classmates from the 17th Intake Fitters and Turners who attended the wake at Gail's and over a few drinks reminisce about Roger. The raffle prizes this year have been donated by Gail in memory of Roger.

I have just received the sad news of the death of ex-Corporal Stephen Mason who served in Vietnam on *AV1353 Harry Chauvel, AV1354 Brudenell White* and *AS3051 John Monash*. His children would like to hear from anyone who knew him. If you can assist please contact Ross McMurray. Further details will be published in the next newsletter.

OCKA

JAMAIS ETRE REMORQUE

ANZAC DAY MARCH, SYDNEY

Assemble on the corner of Phillip and Bent Streets in front of the Legal and General building by 1000 hrs. Step off time is usually around 1100 hrs. The Banner Party has been appointed in advance, and after it has formed up please fall in behind it in columns of ten. Again, coat, tie and medals please.

ANZAC DAY REUNION LUNCHEON

The Sydney Reunion will again be held at the Hunters Hill RSL Sub-Branch Memorial Hall at the corner of Alexander and Ady Streets, Hunters Hill. This will be an important occasion for two reasons; firstly, Ian Johnston will unveil his second model LSM. This one is larger than the one he made last year and will be over a metre long (scale 1:42). It will be a near perfect replica of *AV1356 Clive Steele*. It is intended that our Association present the model to the Australian War Memorial for display in the Post 1945 Collection which opens late January 2008...

 Secondly, at long last Dave Perham's book, "Rolling Through 32" will be launched. Dave advised that the book is just about completed. He has spent an enormous amount of time and effort on this project. With the help of many contributors he has compiled over 200 pages of stories and pictures about 32 Small Ship Squadron, with many coloured photos. We have received over 230 advance subscriptions for the book which has allowed us to have money up-front to assist with initial production costs. Thank you to all who have contributed. For those who still wish to purchase a book or purchase additional copies include $45.00 (which includes postage) for each book, note it on the Subscription Form, and forward it to our Treasurer, Peter Tierney, along with your annual subscription for year 2009. For those attending the luncheon it is important that you do this by 1 April 2008.

The Reunion Luncheon will commence at 1400 hrs, so please try and be there a bit before this. I know it's often difficult to get away from long lost mates in the city but this is a special occasion and your cooperation would be greatly appreciated. It is also important to get an accurate number of those who are attending so that catering arrangements can be planned effectively. **Firm bookings are required. To keep costs down we will cater for the number that have indicated attendance, so please don't turn up unannounced. If you haven't indicated your attendance but later change your mind please let me know beforehand (we can accept a <u>few</u> late notices up until 20 April).**

The low price of $45.00 per head is again remarkably good value for money. It includes lunch, beer, wines, spirits, soft drinks etc.) For those two people who turn up unannounced the cost will be $60.00). Guests, male and female, old and young are most welcome so why not bring a guest or two for a very enjoyable afternoon.

Accommodation. There are quite a number of hotels and motels in the Gladesville area. If you don't know the area all that well here are some you could try:

Gladesville Motel	157 Victoria Road Gladesville	02 9816 4244
Bayview Tavern	166 Victoria Road Gladesville	02 9817 2632
Choice Hotel	165 Victoria Road Gladesville	13 2400
Gladesville Hotel	386 Victoria Road Gladesville	02 9816 4444
Hunters Hill Hotel (UIO)	64 Gladesville Road Hunters Hill	02 9817 2188

ANZAC DAY RAFFLE

The raffle is on again and tickets are enclosed. The prizes are again, by popular demand, ships clocks and barometers in solid brass porthole style on a timber backing.

First prize:	3' ships clock and barometer
Second prize:	6" ships clock
Third Prize:	3" ships barometer

Please note that these prizes were donated by the late Roger MacDonald. Tickets are still only $1.00 each (or ten for $10.00).

DAWN SERVICES

School of Military Engineering. The traditional Dawn Service at SME will commence at 0530 hrs at the RAE Memorial. Breakfast will be served at the ORs Mess following the service. This service is becoming more popular every year so it would be wise to get there by 0500 hrs to avoid the traffic and get a position close to the memorial. Plenty of parking available.

Georges Heights. The Dawn Service at Georges Heights will commence at 150 hrs. Enter via Suakin Drive (off Middle Head Road). The service will be conducted by Mosman RSL Sub-Branch and assisted by Mosman Lions Club who will provide breakfast after the service.

Sydney. The Sydney Dawn Service will commence at Martin Place at 0530 hrs.

CORRECTIONS

In the December 2007 edition of NTM we made a couple of blues:

The photo on page 15 of Doug Whitwam holding up a large fish was not Doug. He actually took the photo but doesn't know any of the subjects (apart from the fish).

The photo on page 4 is of Garry Smyth, Jeff Beach and **Rob Weirman**. We incorrectly spelt Rob's name. Our apologies and thanks to the many members who brought these to our attention.

2008 AUSTRALIA DAY HONOURS LIST

Congratulations to Lieutenant Colonel Phil Cameron (Rtd) who was awarded the Medal of the Order of Australia (OAM) in the 2008 Australia Day Honours list. He was recognised for his services to the welfare of veterans and their families.

He joined Legacy in 1976 while he was serving in the Army in Canberra and carried out his conviction to helping Legacy with him when he moved to Sydney. He was president of Sydney Legacy in 1995-96 and has been a member of the Legacy Family Welfare Committee since 1977.

From 1970 to 2005 Phil organised the annual market day for St Basil's Church at Artarmon.

On top of all this Phil was a presenter and trainer with the Department of Veterans' Affairs training and information program for more than ten years and was a member of the State Planning Forum on Veterans' Aged Care Services from 1995 to 2005.

Our hearty congratulations go to Phil who has been a member of our Association for decades and is, of course, our Honary Auditor. He has been checking the financial records for over 20 years and has always given wise and timely advice on taxation issues and ways to improve accounting procedures.

AUSTRALIAN SERVICE MEDAL

Bob Freeman advised that crew members who served on *AV1356 Clive Steele* on its trip to Singapore for period 11 January to 3 April 1971 are entitled to the ASM with clasp SE Asia. The ship spent 30 days in Singapore for major repairs. Bob has tracked down quite a few crew members and all of them have been successful with their medal applications. He also said that those who stayed on the *Clive Steele* as 'skeleton crew' during a major refit in Singapore from the end of April 1969 to July 1969 may also be eligible for the ASM. Anyone who has any questions or requires further information about these entitlements should contact Bob on 02 6882 2864. If you would like an application form for the medal contact me on 02 9403 1456 or at editor@smallshipsqn.org.au

NOMINAL ROLL OF VIETNAM VETERANS

The Australian War Memorial has nominal rolls of Australians who served in all wars and most conflicts. Go to www.awm.gov.au and look up Biographical Databases, then Nominal Roll. The Vietnam roll is very good but has some inaccuracies. For instance, you can obtain the unit, ship and period you served in Vietnam. It also has a box for comments. If your entry is wrong in any way advise them the correct details. You can also phone the Support Officer for Nominal Rolls on 1300 780 133 or FAX 02 6289 6571. Incidentally, the unit is shown as 32 Small Ships Squadron. 'Ships' will be changed to 'Ship' in March.

WEBSITE

John Leishman has been working steadily on developing our website and the good news is that it's up and running.
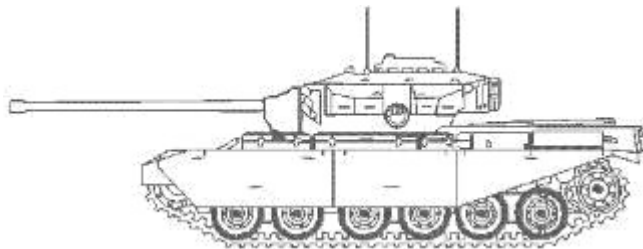
Get on line at http://www.32smallshipsqn.org.au and have a look. Menus are based on general headings, but many – most in fact – beg for content, and that's where YOU come in.

John is quick to stress that our little corner of the web is not set in stone, and ultimately will only be as valuable as the input and ongoing support that is received. So if anyone has ideas on what to put on it, ways to improve it, and is willing to act as a reporter for local ANZAC Day arrangements, members travels, meeting up with old mates, illnesses, or any other thing that's going on in your neck of the woods, let us know. That way we can also put it in the newsletter for those not on-line.

You're the people with a mine of information, pictures, stories and the like. Look at the response Dave received for his book. Fantastic! Very shortly this book, with over 230 pages and hundreds of pictures, will be on sale. Although he has done a great job of putting it all together, and full credit to him, he could only do it with your assistance and support. There are a lot more stories and photos out there, and until Dave puts out Volume 2 they can be shared via the website! So go and look in the shed for your kit bag full of memories and memorabilia.

Lastly, it's 2008 already and the Internet has become ubiquitous (as we all are). It's everywhere, including your local library and it's free. So you don't have to actually own a computer to access us. Nearly one third of our members admit to being on the net but I reckon there are quite a lot who don't own up. Come on guys, if you're not registered, consider why not, and if you are, don't be bashful; let us know your email address. For an association it's important that we all keep in regular touch and maintain a sense of community. From a financial point of view, sending our newsletters electronically contains postage and production costs which allow us to hold back on subscription increases. Having said that, we have to still post out our ANZAC Day raffle tickets this year. But next year we'll have a different system in place for those on the net (trust me).

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There is a good story about this Centurion on page 16

VALE – CHARLIE BAWDEN (1932 – 2008)

Sergeant Charles Ronald Bawden (Rtd) finally succumbed to emphysema and passed away on 13 January 2008. He had been ill for some time and had been in and out of hospital for the last few months.

Charlie's funeral service was held at Wodonga and attended by over 60 friends and shipmates. A contingent of ex-32 Small Ship Squadron members came to bid farewell, including Jack Peel, Bob Madgewick, Rod Cook, Robbie Robinson, Peter Atkinson, Kevin and Lynne Morley, Ocka Murray, Geoff Freeland, Garry Freeland, Laurie Mills, Ross McMurray and Peter Jansen.

Jack delivered a very poignant eulogy which gave an interesting outline of Charlie's earlier life in the Royal Navy, his 20 years in the Australian Army and his final years at Howlong. After his service with 32 Small Ship Squadron Charlie did seven trips to and from Vietnam on *HMAS Sydney* as a member of Ships Army Staff. When the *Sydney* paid off in 1973 Charlie was found to be the longest serving crew member and was invited to cut the decommissioning cake at the ceremony. However, an interesting coincidence was about to unfold. Prior to the *Sydney* joining the RAN she was *HMS Terrible*, a Majestic class aircraft carrier of the Royal Navy. It so happened that she was one of Charlie's first ships he sailed on in the RN. During his service on *Terrible* he befriended a young midshipman who was later to become the Commanding Officer of the *Sydney,* and Charlie again served with him.

Jack also talked about Charlie's marriage to Marge and how they would both visit squadron members' wives when they in hospital having babies. He also spoke of Charlie's devastation when Marge died. He concluded by thanking Kevin and Lynne Morley, and Rod and Sue Cook for looking after Charlie and keeping friends informed of his progress.

At the end of the service Charlie was farewelled by a rendition of one of his favourite tunes, "Homeward Bound" played by the Band of the Royal Marines, and with a Guard of Honour from former shipmates. He was buried in Wodonga Lawn Cemetery with Marge. After the services the mourners adjourned to the Courthouse Hotel, Howlong for heavy bar snacks. It was a very robust and noisy gathering as one would expect under the circumstances, and a fitting conclusion to a sad day.

Charlie enlisted in the Australian Regular Army in 1962 and was discharged in 1982. He served in the following units:

<div align="center">

32 Small Ship Squadron
30 Terminal Squadron
Ships Army Staff, *HMAS Sydney*
10 Terminal Group
69 Terminal Troop
11 Movement Control Group
Albury Transport Unit
He served in Malaya (with the RN), Papua New Guinea and Vietnam.
UBIQUE

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VALE – JOHN BETTERMAN (1944 – 2008)

We recently learned that ex-Corporal John Betterman died earlier this year. He had been fighting cancer for about ten years, and six months ago it got worse and did not respond to treatment. Although in a lot of pain for the last few months he was cheerful and immersed himself in his family and friends. Apparently he had a standing invitation for anyone to call in on him between 1500 and 2200 hrs as long as they brought a decent bottle of red with them.

He was a 16th intake Army Apprentice and on completion of his apprenticeship in 1964 did a marine engineers course at the Transportation Centre, Chowder Bay. However, after completing his FE3 course at SME in 1965 he was posted to 24 Construction Squadron and served in Borneo. On his return he trained as a refrigeration mechanic and was posted to 26 Engineer Stores Squadron at Penrith, and afterwards to SME.

He served with 17 Construction Squadron in Vietnam in 1967 and on his return was posted to 35 Water Transport Squadron where he remained until his discharge in 1970. It seems a little odd that he started and ended his service in Water Transport but served in RAE field units for most of his career. Then again, many of us had some strange postings and could relate similar experiences.

His funeral service was held on 17 January 2008 at the Heyson Chapel at Centennial Park, Adelaide. Our condolences go to his wife and four children.
UBIQUE

VALE – MURRAY NEVILLE (1925 - 2008)

A long time member of our Association, WO1 Murray Neville (Rtd), passed away on 1 February 2008. That's him on the left with his ANZAC March Marshal's armband, with Jeff Beach. Murray was a well known and popular identity and for many years was a Marshall at the Sydney ANZAC Day march. David Hurt, of Forestville RSL Sub-Branch gave a summary of Murray's service history at his funeral service:

In October 1942 Murray joined the Army in Adelaide and six months later joined the A.I.F. After training he embarked for New Guinea in 1944, serving around Lae and Aitape on the north coast. Following the end of World War II, Murray joined the Japan Occupational Forces serving there from 1946 to 1947. Upon his return to Sydney he joined the Regular Army in 1947 and during the following years served in Sydney, Victoria and Tasmania.

In 1965 he joined 32 Small Ship Squadron and sailed to Vietnam for a short time before returning to Australia. He returned to Vietnam in 1970 until 1971 during which time he served as a Supervisor at the Rest Centre at Vung Tau. Upon his return to Sydney, he was promoted to Warrant Officer Class 1 and was the RSM at the Chief Engineers Branch, 2nd Military District at Victoria Barracks.

During this time he became involved in the Sydney ANZAC Day March, and with his experience and expertise, it became more popular and supported by increasing spectators. He was closely connected with it until his passing.

Finally in May 1977 Murray was discharged from the Army after 35 years Military Service which was certainly varied and it could be truly said he did his duty for his country in an exemplary manner. Murray was a true professional.

Murray's funeral service was held at St Martin in the Fields Catholic Church, Davidson (Sydney) on 6 February 2008. It was attended by over 100 people, including his 12 children and 26 grandchildren. Our Association was represented by Graham Murray, Dave Clarke, Phil Cameron, Ian Johnston and Ross McMurray. Many members from Forestville RSL Sub-Branch attended. Peter Allen was going to attend but unfortunately he had a vehicle accident on the way to the funeral. He was unhurt.

John Purcell told this great story about Murray:

"About 1960 as a Sapper or Lance Corporal in a CMF unit, I attended what I think was a junior NCO course at Puckapunyal with a Sapper named Ian Derham who was a cow cocky just north of Morwell, Victoria. We were both about 18 years old.

There were several ARA instructors on the course including the then WO2 Murray Neville and WO2 Ted Graham. There they were, these wonderfully professional instuctors with great military bearing and demeanour, giving precise orders and instructions as we dawdled around their parade ground. We country boys had never seen anything like this before and were thoroughly impressed. In my opinion Murray was the best of them, closely followed by Ted.

One evening just before the ORs boozer closed, we had been discussing them and they formed such an impression on me that I decided I wanted to be a drill instructor. About five years later as a platoon commander at 2RTB I was able to complete that wish by giving several of the drill lessons myself on the same parade ground. We started wondering if their parade ground performance was matched by their off-duty performance or were they just like the rest of us who usually had our heads replaced by pumpkins just before the boozer closed.

At about 2200 hours we decided to check out Murray's after hours form. Full of bravado we presented at the Sergeants' Mess and asked to see WO2 Neville. He appeared with WO2 Graham (we had won the quinella). We said we were having trouble with the "change step" drill movement and for several minutes we were entertained by WO2s Neville and Graham competitively demonstrating the movement. In later years I did not have the heart to raise the issue.

Murray was the RSM at Tn Centre when I was the Adjutant there. Between him and the CO, John Hearn, they had enough children to field two cricket teams. I was also the Supervising Officer of the Sergeants' Mess where Murray was the PMC so I got to know him fairly well, but was never close. He always maintained aloofness that he believed the dignity of his rank and position demanded. Then again perhaps he had a long and vivid memory!

It was always a pleasure to catch up with him at Hunters Hill on ANZAC Day after he finished his duties as a marshal at the Sydney march. I last saw him in 2006 and his demeanour, bearing and physical appearance had changed very little over the 46 years I had known him. He was a much quieter Murray Neville in his latter days and was very active in his daily walks. He was also a very strong family man and proud of his children's achievements. He was very much the professional RSM when I last saw him and I, like his many friends and comrades, will miss him greatly. I certainly will never forget that life long image that he portrayed.

I hope you don't mind me sharing my thoughts"

Thanks for that John. I think we all share your views about this great bloke.
UBIQUE

VALE – ROGER MACDONALD (1946 – 2008)

Roger was diagnosed with a brain tumour in early 2006. It was successfully removed shortly after it was discovered and for the last eighteen months he seemed to have it under control. However, late last year a secondary cancer was found and although he had aggressive therapy for it he did not respond to treatment. He passed away peacefully at home on 9 February 2008. It was good to see Dave Clarke visit him from Thailand. He was a great support to Roger and his wife, Gail, in the last couple of weeks and his presence gave Roger a big boost .

You would all be aware that Roger was the stalwart publisher of our Association newsletter. He did the hard yards of putting it all together accurately and on time. After I had invariably made a mess of the editorial side of it he would fix it up with his usual no-nonsense practical approach, and made sure it got to the printers in perfect format. Even though I often told him I was responsible for any stuff-ups (and I always was) he would say they were his fault.

Roger will also be remembered for his work on the committee. He would always participate in our activities, especially on ANZAC Days where he would arrive first and usually be the last to leave. During these functions he would run the raffle and be a responsible barman (well someone had to) as shown in the above photo. He always did this willingly and without fuss. He will be sorely missed as a good mate.

His funeral was held at the Northern Suburbs Crematorium, Sydney on 13 February 2008. Over 140 people attended, with the following Association and ex-32 Small Ship Squadron members, wives and friends: Brian and Val Waites, Geoff Summergreene and Jacqueline Hardy, Peter and Gwen Allen, Jack Peel, Peter Atkinson, Brian Hart, Dave and Grant Clarke, Alf Smith, Lance and Lynne Northey, Ken and Kaye Shannon, Laurie Mills, Graham, Beth and Anthony Murray, Phil Cameron, John Bryant, Ross and Jenny McMurray, Allan Reading, John McGregor, Les Dennis, Bruce and Joyce Reilly, Ian and Eileen Henderson, Garry Smyth, Jim Patterson, Ken Duncan, Don Kennedy and Peter Tierney.

Some of Roger's class of the 17th intake of Fitters and Turners, Army Apprentices School also paid their respects: Bob Bruce, Dave Shearer, Geoff Suthers, Adrian Combes, Geoff Monk, Ian Gould, John Pigeon, Dave Clarke and Graham Murray. Many of those attending came from interstate. No doubt I've missed a few names and if so I do apologise.

Many could not attend the service and these included Ian Johnston, Bob Freeman, Tich Freeman, Geoff Freeland, Bill Culbertson, Ross Grant, Al Parry, Mal Campbell, Kerry Stuart, Alan White and Phil Cannane. All send their condolences to Gail and Roger's family.

Eulogies were given by the following friends of Roger:

Ocka Murray who spoke about Roger's life in the Army from when he enlisted as an apprentice in 1962, his journey through SME and Tn Centre, and his posting with 4 Troop and 35 Water Transport Squadron before taking discharge with the rank of Sergeant in 1971.

Dave James who is a Chief Engineer on Sydney Tugs and worked with Roger, spoke of his work at Adsteam and his many fond memories of the work they did on Sydney harbour.

Don Keir from Roger's golfing fraternity told a few stories about his golfing prowess at home and overseas, especially in Borneo and China.

Gail spoke about her life with Roger (well not all of it), but especially about the last months they shared together and reminisced on the great times they had. The service was mostly unstructured and was really a reflection of Roger's life and achievements, with word and prayer. Actually, it was more of a celebration of Roger's life and not a sad occasion at all.

Frank Larbalestier, President of Hunters Hill RSL Sub-Branch, gave the RSL address. He also remembered how he tutored Roger in mathematics to help him obtain his 2nd and Chief Engineer qualifications.

Yes, a great bloke and one of nature's gentlemen. Goodbye old friend.
UBIQUE

NEW MEMBERS

We welcome aboard the following new members to the Association:

Bruce Pattison served in 32 Small Ship Squadron on *AV1353 Harry Chauvel, AV1355 Vernon Sturdee* and *AS3051 John Monash* in Vietnam. He now lives at Manly West, Queensland.

Jack Lawson served in 32 Small Ship Squadron in Vietnam on *AV1356 Clive Steele* and *AS3051John Monash.* He now lives at Kawakawa, North Island, New Zealand

Barry Barker served in 35 Water Transport Squadron, 40 Water Transport Squadron (Heavy) on *L126 Balikpapan,* and 6 Transport and Movement Group, Hobart. He now lives at Port Pirie, South Australia.

Rodger Clark recently joined but we have no details about him – just that he lives at Buderim, Queensland. (Send us down a jar of ginger jam, Rog).

Ake Per-Olof (Peter) Ehrnholm served in 32 Small Ship Squadron on *AV1354 Brudenell White* and *AV1356 Clive Steele* in Vietnam. He now lives at Redbank Plains Queensland.

John Fisher was a member of the Royal Regiment of Australian Artillery and served with 32 Small Ship Squadron as a gunner on *AV1356 Clive Steele* in Vietnam. He lives at Korumburra, Victoria.

Graeme Inglis served with 32 Small Ship Squadron in Vietnam on *AV1353 Harry Chauvel, AV13555 Vernon Sturdee* and *AV1356 Clive Steele.* He also served with 55 Engineer Workshop and Park Squadron in Vietnam. He has lived in Kobe, Japan for the last 34 years and is the 2nd Engineer on a chemical tanker of Stolt Nielsen Lines.

Peter Sewell served with 32 Small Ship Squadron on Sqn HQ and *AS3051 John Monash.* He lives at Wangaratta, Victoria.

SICK PARADE

Laurie Graham is still having mobility problems. He will have a right hip replacement on 18 March 2008, which means that after this he will have a complete set of new hips and knees. Good luck at the Beijing Olympics Laurie.

Al Parry has been in hospital having a pacemaker fitted. Last year his cardiologist had some grim news for him but the pacemaker has been a great success and Al is now feeling much better. Good on you mate. That's great news.

Charlie Bawden's funeral service at Wodonga Lawn Cemetery

Standing Left to Right: Ocka Murray, Jack Peel, Rod Cook, Peter Atkinson, Peter Jansen, Geoff Freeland, Robbie Robinson and Bob Madgwick.
Kneeling Left to Right: Kevin Morley, Ross McMurray and Laurie Mill

Charlie at the Sydney ANZAC Day march, Sydney 2005

Here Is Ian Johnston's 1:72 scale model of *AV1344 Brudenell White*. Its length is 900mm, beam 140mm and height 260mm. It is a vey accurate representation of an LSM and Ian is to be commended for it. The attention to detail has to be seen to be believed. It took him nearly a year to complete it. It was unveiled on ANZAC Day 2007 and was shown as a dark blob in the July 2007 newsletter. Hopefully these two photos will be a little clearer. Ian will be unveiling a much larger 1:48 scale model of *AV1356 Clive Steele* this coming ANZAC Day at the Hunters Hill Memorial Hall, and it is intended that this one will be presented to the Australian War Memorial.

Last Drinks
Gail and Roger MacDonald at Hunters Hill Memorial Hall
On ANZAC Day 2007

The Three Amigos
Murray Neville, Jack Peel and Al Reading at Hunters Hill Memorial Hall on
ANZAC day. The date is unknown but Murray never seemed to age (can't say
the same for the other two)

A CENTURION AT VUNG TAU

In the December 2005 issue of Notice to Mariners we showed this photo of a Centurion tank on the ramp of *AV1356 Clive Steele* at Vung Tau. We asked members if they could give some details of the photo and if they remembered the circumstances surrounding it. We had two responses; one from Wally Blumenfeld and the other from George Stubbs. They both agreed it was one of the twelve tanks that had recently arrived from Australia on the *Jeparit* and delivered to Cam Ranh Bay where they were unloaded onto the *Clive Steele* and transported to Vung Tau.

So far, so good. However, George Stubbs recently wrote to us and said that he had a re-think about it and now thinks it is a tank that was blown up with a mine on operations in early 1969 and it was being back loaded at Cam Ranh Bay for return to Australia. Sadly, the driver was killed in the blast. George says his death was caused by the compartment drain plug being blown out. It had been screwed in from the inside instead of the outside as required where the plugs safety flange was designed to stop this happening. Apparently the tank was the one displayed outside the Australian War Memorial, but has since been relocated elsewhere.

The story was also taken up by Mike Cecil, the Senior Curator Heraldry and Military Technology at the AWM who thinks that it is not a new tank arriving from Australia via Cam Ranh Bay (ie, disembarking from the LSM). It is actually a tank driving onto the LSM after its tour in Vietnam. He thinks that the 23B call sign on the 100gallon fuel tank is likely to be a tank which hit a mine on 29 December 1969. He would like a copy of the original photo so he can identify the tanks Army Registered Number (ARN). He would then confirm it and send us its story and a photo of the tank actually hitting the mine.

Jim Benton, XO of the *Clive Steele* in 1969/70 said he remembered a mine damaged tank being brought onto the ship, and he heard that the driver was killed. The bottom of the tank was badly buckled He said the photo was taken on the hard standing at Vung Tau and the LST in the background is possibly *USS Iredale County*. He remembers bringing back the tank from Baria to Vung Tau. He said that tanks loaded for Baria were always reversed on so that they could disembark front on and ready for action. Jim sent this photo of 23B returning to Australia on the *Clive Steele* in March 1970

Another correspondent, Nobby Clark, was a tank crew commander at the time and writes, "Had a look at the photo you sent. I am fairly sure it was 23B that went up on the mine on 29 December 1969. I know my Alpha tank was back in Nui Dat for repairs and I had borrowed another tank from the troop. Roberts was present that day and he would have been the Charlie call sign. I know Crombie was not with us and he was the usual Bravo commander. My tank came out of the workshops the next day and I went back to it. I did not see the damaged tank after that. Certainly the fire damage to the mantlet is consistent with the blast and the tank in the photo appears to have newish road wheels at the left rear. (the rear wheels on that side immediately went up in flames after the explosion). All in all I would have to say that's the one".

Norm Wells from WA, an armoured vehicle mechanic with 1st Armoured Regiment Workshop in Vietnam writes, "The tank that the driver was killed by a drain plug returned to service in Australia after a rebuild. Soon after in 1969 a mine blew the entire floor out of the driver's compartment, and that driver was one of two fatal casualties in Centurion tanks in Vietnam".

"The tank that for years was on display in the late 1970s and 1980s outside the Australian War Memorial and now on display at the Armoured Centre Museum was a non-goer that was returned from Vietnam with a central dent in the hull floor from mine damage (first offset mine). The damage crushed the bakelite rotary based junction that transferred electricity to the turret – so the damage resulted in an electrically dead turret but outwardly it looked OK. The hull was a bit too thick to panel beat so the hull was unrepairable. I signed the AF 406 that sent it home. All crewmen remained fit for duty after the incident which occurred on 15 September 1968. It was a C Squadron tank, ARN 169 080, Callsign 30D".

Bruce Cameron, MC – a Royal Australian Armoured Corps historian, replied, "The tank Norm refers to about the drain plug incident returned to Vietnam for a second tour. Its barrel is on display in the AWM (it was damaged when its muzzle got in the way of an RPG being fired at me). Interestingly, it was the last tank to leave Vietnam and did a "drive-past" at Nui Dat on C Squadron's final parade. Having said all that, it's not the tank in the photo".

Bruce followed this up by outlining the possible background to the 23B, "Eleven tanks were off-loaded from the *Jeparit* onto the *Clive Steele* at Cam Ranh Bay on 24 August 1968. The tanks would have normally been put onto LCMs at Vung Tau and taken to the Baria hard. No heavy lift crane was available at Vung Tau at that time. A US LCT was to have accompanied the *Clive Steele* to Vung Tau, however it didn't turn up so *AV1356* had to do three trips.

"The call sign on the back of the tank shows that it was assigned to 'B' Squadron, 1 Armoured Regiment in 1969. Callsigns were not allocated until tanks arrived in-country, so it's not a tank being unloaded. The mine incident referred to actually happened on 14 December 1968. That was a C squadron tank and its call sign would have started with a '3' (rather than a '2'). The tank which had a call sign 23B (ARN 169109) hit a mine on 29 December 1969. A Squadron had taken over a few days before and the crew commander was the troop sergeant at the time (his tank was undergoing repair). The callsign of the tank at the time it hit the mine was 13A (although 23B could have still been painted on it)".

"The mine was a big one (chicom explosive plus a number of blinds, estimated at 60lb equivalent). It was also offset. A group of enemy had been seen by a helicopter pilot and the tank troop was directed by the infantry commander to investigate. It was a trap. The crew commander suspected something and reversed through a defile as they approached the enemy sighting at dusk. The explosion split the hull and started a fire which engulfed the engine compartment. The crew escaped. There was a danger of ammo exploding and the tank was left abandoned through the night (under observation and with machine gun rounds fired in the vicinity to keep any VC away)".

"The tank was returned to Australia in early 1969. The hull was replaced with one from NZ. This is the tank Mike Cecil referred to in paragraph three, and asked for a copy of the photo to confirm the ARN. The tank that was at the AWM is ARN 169080. It was not the one involved in the 14 December 1968 incident (though it was incorrectly labled as such for some time). It is now at the Tank Museum at Puckapunyal".

Bruce also explained how the tank callsign system works. "The first number designates the squadron: 1=A, 2=B, 3=C. The second number designates the troop number and the letter designates the crew commander within the troop, eg A=tp sgt, B=tp cpl. So tank 23B was from B Squadron (2), 3 Troop (3) with the troop cpl as the troop commander (B). When a crew commander changes tanks, his call sign goes with him. Painting callsigns on the back of tanks can lead to confusion. It's best to use the wired on metal plate that can easily be moved from tank to tank. Bruce added that the only definite way to identify a particular tank is by its ARN".

So there we have it! Although there are a few disconnects with dates, ARNs and call signs we now know a bit about tank 23B in Vietnam. Actually we may not know much about it at all except that it was photographed on the ramp of the *Clive Steele*. We only know its call sign which from the explanations given above, is very portable and goes with the crew commander. What we really need is the ARN of the tank to give us the complete picture. No doubt we will get more information from members about this shortly! What a great story.

Many thanks to these people who assisted with this story: Mick Ryan, John Pritchard, Bruce Cameron, Mike Cecil, Colin Symons, Col Filtness, Norm Wells, Wally Blumenfeld, George Stubbs and Jim Benton.

Here is Centurion Tank ARN 169080 at the Tank Museum, Puckapunyal

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Association Polo Shirt (navy blue, white, red) made to order……………..$25.00

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