



# The Apprentice About

Newsletter for the Australian Army Apprentices Association Inc

Volume 1, Issue 3

March 2011

## From the President

I knew that the expression “the earth moved” had some connotations, but I didn’t realise until this week the extent to which it could also be a wake up call.

As I watched the disaster unfold in Christchurch I was moved to contemplate upon how close our two nations are and the subtle but undeniably beneficial change in the character of the bonds of ANZAC. The new and changing facets of that relationship may be far removed from the grit and grind of Gallipoli but they continue to build around the heartwood of Lone Pine.

It is that durable central core of our relationship that is most clearly seen in times of great hardship and duress; fires and floods in Australia and now the ravaging earthquakes which continue to afflict New Zealand. These events strike at the heart of those who understand the meaning of ANZAC on both sides of the ditch and out comes the helping hand of a mate.

The most recent event in Christchurch prompted me to think about how we might be able to help. Having been in the job of President of the Association for a less than a week it took a little time to get my head around to the fact that our Association is in reality an Association of Tradesmen and women. As such it contains a vast reservoir of trained people with a huge range of skills and experience with a giant reputation for finding a way to get the job done.

I wondered whether we could tap into that reservoir and contacted a few of our members to see if they felt the same as I did; that maybe we could be of use or of service in an emergency.

*(continued)*

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## AUSTRALIAN ARMY APPRENTICES ASSOCIATION INCORPORATED

ACT Incorporation No A04404

GPO Box 2072, CANBERRA, ACT, 2601

[www.austarmyapprentice.org](http://www.austarmyapprentice.org)

**Patron:** Lieutenant General Ken Gillespie, AC, DSC, CSM, Chief of Army



## Thanks from Past President Frank Poole

To all Members

I firstly want to apologise to you all for having to resign as your President earlier than I had planned; believe me it was not an easy decision and one that gave me great disappointment.

However, increasing family and business pressures were making it extremely difficult to devote the time necessary to head up our Association, and without that time I felt the Association would suffer.

In the past four years much has been accomplished to ensure that the era of the Army Apprentice is part of Army and Australia’s history, and I thank all of you for entrusting in me the leadership of the Association over this period; it has truly been an honour and privilege.

I also recognise the tremendous help and mateship that I have received from past and present committee members, and I thank them all sincerely.

I remain involved in the association management as a Committee Member and as Chair of the Memorial Sub-Committee.

Barry Teal now takes over the reins and I am sure that under his guidance the Association will continue to thrive and grow. Please give him all the support that he asks.

Kind regards to all

*Frank.*



More particularly could we help, if not in Christchurch on this occasion, then when the inevitable occurs somewhere and sometime in the future? I was pleased to hear that the few I contacted felt the same way I did.

A quick consult with the Chief of Army pointed the way to the organisation that could use our potential and they have been contacted.

Consequently we are now setting the wheels in motion to get information out to our regional representatives so that we have a point of regional contact around Australia.

When the organisation is bedded down it will be the Regional Reps through whom we will work to put before ex serving former Army Apprentices and other Army Tradesmen and Women the opportunity to continue to 'put in' if called upon. This will be achieved by us maintaining a register by region of those who are able and willing to answer the phone call and the three key questions "Can you?" "Will you?" "When and for how long?"

it will be our organised mass of skills, qualifications together with the added dimension of our experience in the Army that raises the asset value of our contribution.

The earth will move again and your training will be needed in some way somewhere. You can register your willingness to be contacted on a regional basis by contacting the Association through the website [membership@austarmyapprentice.org](mailto:membership@austarmyapprentice.org).

Or send me an email ([president@austarmyapprentices.org](mailto:president@austarmyapprentices.org)). I'll be honoured to put your name and details on the register.

All the best

*Barry*

Barry Teal - President

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## Position Vacant

Editor – "The Apprentice About"

Feeling creative?

Have some time to spare?

Have a good working knowledge of Microsoft Word?

Have a reliable internet account?

Why not consider taking on the Editorial role of this newsletter.....

Due to changing employment, the current editor no longer has the time available to carry out the role of editor as well as Membership Secretary.

If you are interested, please contact [membership@austarmyapprentice.org](mailto:membership@austarmyapprentice.org)

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## From the Website

The AAAA Inc. Internet Forum (also known as a message board) provides a managed, online discussion site for Apprentices and others. You may access the Forum (that is post messages and read existing messages) by creating your own log in.

The Forum Moderator (Jeff Heron, 21st Radio) is responsible for managing the Forum and making sure it remains relevant and up to date. He (or the Webmaster, Ian Morris) can also provide guidance on the use of the Forum.

The AAAA Forum contains the following topics and sub-topics:

**GENERAL: Profile Changes** - for those that are registered - maintain your profile here.

**Contact Details** - AAAA members can keep the Association updated on their current contact details.

**AAAA Inc AGM** - notices for Assn AGMs.

**Vale notices.**

**Association Q & A** - for questions & answers

**Breaking News** - covering urgent news.

**General Q & A** - for questions & answers on anything not covered.

**Looking for ?** - if you are looking for a lost Apprentice.

**RAP (Regimental Aid Post)** - notification area for reporting on Apprentices currently on the sick parade.

**Wanted &/or For Sale** - general items, either wanted or for sale, eg memorabilia, DVDs, etc

**ANZAC Day** - reunions &/or marches specifically on ANZAC Day.

**60th Reunion DVD** - available using the order form from the Merchandise section of the website.

**TALES FROM THE PAST:** Your Stories here -.

**Appies Making Good** -.

**REUNIONS:** • **Upcoming Reunions** -.

**60th Reunion** - all things to do with the 60th Reunion.

**50th Reunion** - Poem by 18555 David W. Kalman (10th Veh Mech).

**FEEDBACK: General Feedback** - received from anywhere on the Association &/or website etc.

**FORUM:** • **Job Opportunities** - put job ads here for others or look for opportunities for yourself.

[www.austarmyapprentice.org/forum/](http://www.austarmyapprentice.org/forum/)

Jeff Heron  
21st Radio Mech  
Forum Moderator

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## CALENDAR OF EVENTS - REUNIONS

Do you have a reunion or event that you would like to announce to the membership?. If so, please let us know.

### Apprentices Together - 2011 Reunion

Planning is now well underway for our next major national Association event that will be held in Canberra over the period 27<sup>th</sup> – 31<sup>st</sup> October 2011

The Association, in recognising that the Intakes were and still are the bonding focus of the AAS, intends to provide a "function umbrella", so that intakes are able to conduct individual reunions, and at the same time come together in a display of combined mateship from days past to the present. This gathering will cover four days and provide the flexibility that will allow the Intakes to do their own thing, plus plenty of time to enjoy all that Canberra has to offer for visitors. The Association will organize key functions to ensure that the reunion maintains its momentum, purpose and solidarity. A draft breakdown of the daily events can be found on the website.

For more information contact Frank Maloney, the Association Events Manager ([frmal@bigpond.com](mailto:frmal@bigpond.com)) and watch the web page at <http://www.austarmyapprentice.org/armyapprenticestogether2011.html>

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## A Brief History of LtCol Cecil Ives

The Man Who Became a CO of the Army Apprentices School Balcombe

A big success story of the Australian Army contribution to World War 2 was the raising and operation of the Armoured Fighting Vehicle (AFV) School during early 1940 in which the Army Instructional Corps (AIC) was the significant player. Initially (and coincidentally) the school was located at the Balcombe Vic army camp but after about 2 months it was moved to Puckapunyal Vic because there was a much larger training area needed for armoured vehicle deployment.

All instructional staff posted to the school came from the AIC, many of them graduates of No.9 special instructor course. Only two of the AIC Warrant Officer instructors at that period had any overseas training, they being WO2 Keith Watts who had previously gone to the UK for training and Cecil Ives, a British armoured corps WO2 who had transferred to the Australian army in 1937.

LtCol Hopkins, the then CO of the AFV school, selected WO2 Watts to take command of the Gunnery & Driving Wing and also WO2 Ives to command the Maintenance Wing of the AFV school. Within a short time WO2 Watts was promoted to Major and WO2 Ives to Captain (although he was promoted to Major 3 months later) By the early 1940's the Australian 1st Armoured Division consisted of 270 Officers, 800 NCO's and 3,400 soldiers and the task of the AFV school was to train all of these officers and 50% of the other ranks of this Australian armoured division.

Similarly to the infantry and artillery units at the time, all the AIC officers and warrant officers of the AFV School subsequently undertook key appointments in the various armoured regiments on active service. This Included both Keith Watts and Cecil Ives RAAC who were active during WW2.

Cecil Ives was born in the UK on 13/05/1903, he joined the Australian Army AIC as a WO2 instructor on 20/03/1937 to instruct on the current armoured fighting vehicles operation and maintenance prior to the formation of the newly formed AFV school at Balcombe during early 1940.

It is with some irony that LtCol Cecil Ives RAAC once again returned to Balcombe during 1953 but this time as the CO of the Australian Army Apprentices School, a posting from which he is very well remembered by the earlier apprentice intakes as a stern no-nonsense Commanding Officer.

Harry Cole

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## Old Time Balcombe Days.

David Barton 2/42681

I have been inspired by reading Jerry Neale's story in the Apprentice newsletter to ponder upon the days of yore when the magical seventh intake arrived at a nondescript and grubby galvanised iron army camp (circa 1 Marine Div WW11) which was called the Army Apprentices School.

People from different states had distinct accents and we talked about football etc (in the days before TV – we had never seen AFL etc) . We commenced three months recruit training which was pretty full on for neive fifteen year old boys. At the conclusion of this we were invited to do another three months recruit training as workshops etc were not yet constructed – later we finished constructing them. Among those pleasures was the joy of dribbling white paint onto WO1 "Bull" Aberdeen's cap as we painted in the roof of the workshop.

Another unforgettable character was Lt Bill Stipweich, who, as rumour had it, was one of the six surviving prisoners of the Sandakan Death march. This was still secret, however the truth did finally come out and the rumours were true. I recall him arranging a great round up of stray dogs which we herded up to him on the parade ground and he happily shot them all with a .38 pistol. His lively action worked as I do not recall seeing a dog there ever after that. In hindsight I wonder what our CO Col Ives, thought of these "colonial" field commissioned officers from WW11.

Another interesting character, who was most respected by us hardened juvenile offenders was the Adjutant, Major George Thirlwell aka "The Black Prince" who had won the Military Cross in new Guinea and deserved another in Korea. He was my idea of a good officer, quiet, reserved and direct.

For all those "appys" and "sprogs" I read about ( I have never heard those terms in my experience) during our Balcombe days the Korean War was still on and several of our Officers and NCO's had just returned from there and WW11 experience, which made some of them difficult to understand and unpredictable, whilst others were outstanding people. Most of us accepted that some had stress related problems- not that we could do anything about it, we just learnt to survive.

There are hundreds more stories however In 1954 we graduated. I suspect perhaps better soldiers than tradesmen, but in the following years we learnt our trade and I reckon the Army was well repaid by our service.

Overall thoughts? We were just bloody kids really but we all became lifelong mates.



The Seventh –Anzac Day Mornington 1953.



**Subject: Plant Fitter training, School of Military Engineering (SME) February, 1961, and the effect on the Corps/Squadrons to function independently.**

**Author: Peter Radford**

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Ten of the Army Apprentices' graduating class of twenty, 13th intake Fitter and Turners were posted to the SME for training as Fitters, Plant ECN(?) The course was designated 1/61 Plant Fitters Basic.

First however a basic course in earthmoving plant daily operator servicing, adjustments and operation was required for familiarisation. The regular Plant Roads and Airfields (PRA) instructors were responsible for this section of the course and machines taught were;

- Motor graders Caterpillar No.12
- Front end loaders Michigan 85A series 1
- Tracked tractors (bull 'dozers) Fowler Challenger 3 and IHC TD18 (182) series
- Rubber tyred 'dozers Letourneau Westinghouse LW16
- Excavators Ruston Bucyrus 22RB (all attachments)
- Elevating Scrapers Letourneau Westinghouse model "D" pull

The SME was limited in its capacity to train mechanical subjects and a WO1, Clerk of Works, Mechanical, was seconded from 6ESR, Penrith as training officer. Once again only a very basic course was offered; the students at 19-20 years of age knew no difference and had been trained as fitters and turners, so this was a whole new experience.

Also at this time the requirements of the Victorian Apprenticeship Commission had to be fulfilled by the trainees completing the fourth and final year as fitters and turners. This was carried out at the nearby RAEME 2nd. Base Workshops, Moorebank, NSW.

The Commonwealth Department of Works (CDW) operated a large workshop for heavy equipment repair at Villawood, NSW some 12 miles distant from the SME. The CDW was a contractor to the Army for equipment repair and agreed to assist in the training of the ten fitters. This was a huge opportunity to be "hands on" with all makes and models of plant equipment.

At the end of the year, postings were announced to the various RAE Squadrons situated around Australia. These Squadrons at the time had large workshops both black and white trades. The author can only speak to the 17th. Construction Squadron as there was various manning requirements for the other Squadrons.

Mechanically the Squadron strength was:

- 2 motor mechanics
- 2 welders
- 2 Plant fitters
- 1 Fitter and Turner
- RAEME Light Aid Detachment (LAD) consisting of a corporal and 6 mechanics

The spare parts indenting and ordering for plant equipment was hit and miss at the best. Parts books were 'sometimes' available, however in nearly every case there were no repair manuals to assist in the completion of repairs and the interface with the parts manuals to order the correct parts. Most requisitions had to be taken to the 2nd. Base Ordnance Depot and walked through the process. It was then up to the unit to contact the vendor and expedite and physically go to pick up the part(s). This was the norm then and no experience was gained in the correct method of obtaining parts, if in fact there was a method. This was all too apparent when the Squadron was sent to Papua New Guinea (PNG). Although a full strength RAEME workshop and RAAOC store was attached, there was always a delay in ordering and obtaining parts.

The RAEME senior NCOs had only a basic knowledge of "C" vehicle training at the RAEME training centre and in most cases deferred to the RAE plant fitter for results.

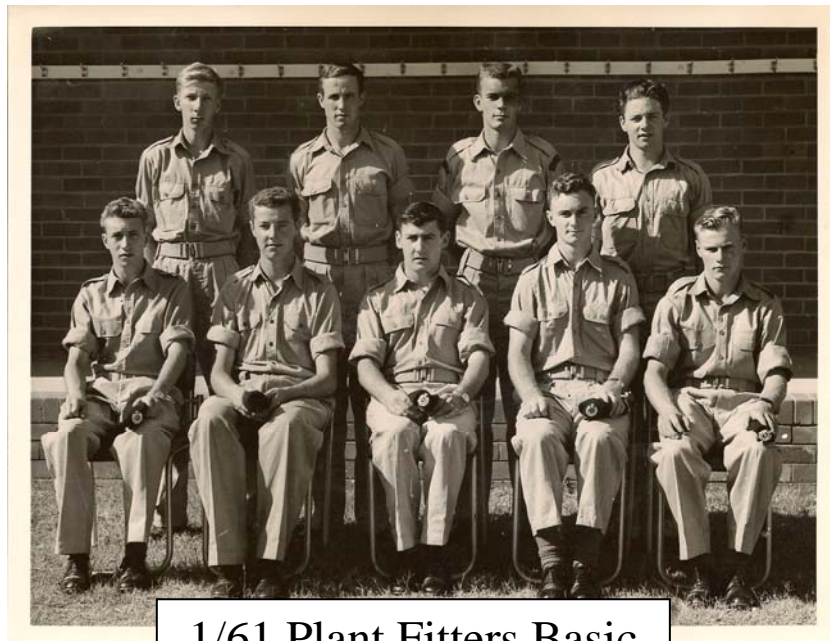
In 1965/66 A detailed report on repair efficiency was ordered and produced from machine repair records. This showed a severe breakdown in the system as to the amount of repair parts allocation allowed by the Squadron store and the large lag time in obtaining parts through the "system. As a result, in 1966, a full complement of RAEME and RAAOC personnel marched in as Workshop troop.



This then ended the era of the RAE Plant Fitter and squadron independence.

The author of this blog was extremely vocal about the “taking over” of the Corps assets and interrupting the career path of many RAE personnel. This personal grudge has been carried for the past fifty years. Now, on the eve of the 50th anniversary of the Graduation Day for the 13th. Intake Army Apprentices and the future RAE Plant Fitters it is time to bury the hatchet and reflect instead on the career successes of those ten Sappers who went on to OCS, changed Corps to RAEME, became plant operators or elected to take discharge.

It was obvious that the RAEME Training Centre had far the superior facilities for training mechanical, electrical and hydraulic systems on all types of mobile equipment from Land Rovers to Tanks and earthmoving ‘C’ vehicles. The fact that the RAE plant fitters could keep their fleets running in remote areas of the country and especially on the beaches and in the jungles to Australia’s north was a tribute to the men’s ingenuity and not so much the training received at the SME.



## 1/61 Plant Fitters Basic Course

School of Military Engineering, February  
1961



## Memoirs of an Army Apprentice in the Fourth Year

242724 Harry C. Cole

Along with all the other members of my 7<sup>th</sup> intake Army Apprentices at the end of our 3 years of Army Apprentices School training, we were all given our postings during December 1954 to the various units where we were to complete the fourth year of our trade training.

As expected most of the vehicle mechanics, electricians, fitters and blacksmiths were either sent to RAEME or RAE units whereas those others in the radio, electronics or instrument trades seemed to go towards RA Sig units as a general rule. I was advised that I was posted to RAEME and that together with Wally Cove, I had to report to Sydney Workshops, which at the time was located at Charles Street Leichhardt NSW. This was later to be the home of 103 Field Workshop

Upon our arrival we were interviewed by the OC Capt Harry Boufler who did not have any prior notice of our posting to his unit and he then advised us that they did not have the proper facilities or instructors at Sydney Workshops to train us in our vehicle mechanic trade nor was there any suitable accommodation locally available for us to use.

Consequently the next day we had to report to 2 Base Workshop Moorebank where we were interviewed by the CO LtCol Bert Blundell and the RSM Laurie Sargeant then we rejoined some of our own apprentice intake and those of our senior classes in some "hands on" mechanic training.

I was allocated for my training with a likeable civilian tradesman (Percy Mortenson) who was a very experienced mechanic and a good teacher and who actually taught me a lot of mechanical work on the Willy's/Ford Jeeps plus the many varieties of blitz wagons, GMC trucks and Matilda Tanks then being overhauled by the workshop.

During the year and together with the other 7<sup>th</sup> intake vehicle mechanics I also completed the Class 1 B Vehicle course at Bandiana Vic.

Surprisingly after the crammed up 20 to a hut type accommodation experienced at Balcombe, we were given our own room in the Nissan type buildings at Moorebank. This was so good as I never had my own room before even when I was a child at home.

We were still in the army and each morning and afternoon were assembled and marched as a group up to and from the workshop by the duty NCO. Likewise at lunch time we were marched down and back to/from the OR's mess. We also were rostered on as duty picket or driver and drove all employees, both civilian and military, to and from Liverpool station daily as there was no public transport available and even less people at the workshop owned private cars.

During 1955 the 2 Base Workshop was requested to provide a Harley Davidson motorcycle stunt team for the army tattoo that was to be held at Sydney Showground in July of that year. Those who thought they could ride a brand new WB Harley Davidson motorcycle could have an opportunity to prove it and under the supervision of WO1 Eric Moore (aka mumps & bumps), Alan Rutledge and Sgt Neil Toyer plus some of the senior class apprentices, ie. George Stone and Graham Morrison, we commenced our training on the motor cycles in the paddock opposite the workshop.

Those who completed this riding course including myself, Wally Cove, John Heppell and many others who then had the opportunity to ride in the military tattoo which was a great experience for us.

Singleton Workshop was at the time an offshoot of 2 Base Workshop and if they were short of tradesmen you were sent there on detachment. Again myself and Wally Cove were sent there for 3 months. The OC was Capt Wally Walpert and the ASM Len Hunt and that is where I met for the first time Cpl Bill Beggs (Billy havachat).

Singleton Workshop was the repair facility for what could be called a military vehicle collectors delight. There were Staghounds, White APC's, Bren Carriers, Golf Ball Recce Vehicles, Matilda Tanks, Covenor Bridge Layer Tanks, Diamond T Wreckers, Federal Prime Movers and all other types of WW2 GS vehicles in all configurations imaginable that were produced.

These were always well maintained for the heavy CMF units training requirements which happened on most weekends and we were regularly rostered on standby for onsite repairs.

It should be noted that the Infantry Training Centre was at Ingleburn and not at Singleton at this time.

I found 2 Base Workshop to be a really first class and enjoyable training facility that was effectively set up and organised by those experienced Officers, WO's and NCO's to train the many army apprentices in their fourth year in the real world of the Australian army workshop repair and maintenance systems.

**All good things must come to an end and after the 1955 Christmas holiday break I was advised I was to be posted to RMC Workshop Duntroon as a vehicle mechanic with Lt Brian Grey (later DGEME) as OC.**



## AAAA COMMITTEE

POSITION	Appointment	POSITION	Appointment
Patron	Lieutenant General Ken J. Gillespie, AC, DSC, CSM	Membership Secretary	Craig Malcolm
President	Barry Teal	Heritage Officer	Geoff Martin
Vice President	Lucas McGann	Member	Frank Pool
Secretary	Lucas McGann	Member	Michael Farrar
Treasurer	Owen Reynolds	Member	Glen Jones
Welfare Officer	Russell Evans	Member	Jeff Heron
Public Officer	Ray Wilson	Member	Bill Merton
Events Manager	Frank Maloney	Member	Jock McWhinney
Webmaster	Ian Morris	Memorabilia	Jack Westernhagen

**The Apprentice About is published Quarterly (or thereabouts).**

**If you have any contributions to this newsletter (which would be greatly appreciated) please send them to:**  
[membership@austarmyapprentice.org](mailto:membership@austarmyapprentice.org)

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