

PIONEER NEWS

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PIONEER NEWS - 1952 to 1998

As mentioned in a previous copy of the Mail Bag the Pioneer News has just concluded its 45th year of publication and still going strong, thanks to the support of its many contributors through donations as well as letters for the Mail Bag. Without this support the paper would cease to exist.

At a committee meeting of the 2/1 - 2/2 Pioneer Btms Association in 1948 it was proposed that every effort be made to write the history of the 2/1st Pioneer Battalion and, if at all possible, to endeavour to publish a newsletter. However, it was not until 1952 that the Committee of the day felt sure they could turn out something regular and worthwhile that could maintain contact with those members of both units whom they already knew and try to re-establish relations with those whom they had not seen for years since the war finished.

The Committee comprised Hec. Page, Frank Cheal and Bill Robertson 2/2, and Max Law, Rod Pegg and Harry "Monty" Montague 2/1. Subsequently, Max Law, as secretary, wrote to the various newspaper groups around Australia and in almost every case the Association's plea for members was published in city and country newspapers alike, resulting in quite a list of members being enrolled.

The first issue appeared in December, 1952, edited by Max Law 2/1 and Frank Cheal 2/2. It was a small typewritten sheet of eight pages containing a President's message (at that time Hec. Page 2/2) and a message from our Patron, that great lady Mrs. Lilla O'Malley Wood, with very encouraging words for the new venture. Mrs. O'malley Wood had been instrumental in forming the 2/1st Pioneer Btn. Comfort Fund in 1940 and later included members of the 2/2nd Pioneer Btn when that unit was reformed in 1942.

The subscription at the time was 2/6d, but donations of larger amounts were gratefully received. The postage was 3 1/2d. each, so there was not a lot left over to publish the paper. Max and Frank attempted to get enough news to continue printing the news each quarter, enlisting the help of a young typist at the bank where Frank worked to type the contents onto a stencil to be roneod. This was done free of charge. After a few issues two good friends of Max who were printers set up and printed the news free of cost. This arrangement carried on for some time and gradually the Pioneer News began to take on a more professional look.

By the end of 1953, however, the news had grown from its small beginnings as a typewritten roneod sheet to a small printed edition and able to be registered at the GPO as a periodical. The Mail Bag in those days was printed as "In Passing" and as time went by and more members were contacted, the number grew.

As it was now possible to contact members by virtue of the news, the Association was able to hold quite a lot of functions resulting in not only the men getting together for the Anzac march and reunions but families able to join in outings and meet one another.

These were in the form of Christmas parties for the children (money for gifts often being raised by Mrs O'Malley Wood and the ladies from the Comforts Fund), picnics, car trials, dances etc. These were all very well patronised and would have not been possible only by publicity in the news.

By 1958 our mailing list had grown to nearly 900 members of both units and printed for the grand sum of £13-8s. (\$27.60). Before the addressograph machine was purchased in 1959, the wrappers for the paper were typed each issue by Peg Herron as at that stage Max was a co-editor with Max Law. When Max Law was transferred to Adelaide by his firm in 1959 Max Herron was appointed as editor, with Vic Whiteley as co-editor and responsible for the Mail Bag.

However, in 1963 Bob Lake was appointed as co-editor when Vic Whiteley resigned and was very ably assisted my daughter Gail who typed the Mail Bag for Bob from 1963-1966. When Gail married, his other daughter Eileen "fell" for the job and carried on until she retired from her position at the A.B.C. Bob held the position of co-editor until his untimely death in September 1996.

During the seventies Max and Bob were assisted from time to time with articles by John Harnetty, ex C Coy., - 2/1, who was an interpreter in the 2/1 during the war years, and later became a journalist on one of the city newspapers. The articles were full of humour and a great source of amusement to all who had the good fortune to read them.

Over the years the paper has gone from strength to strength and from that small beginning we have the news as it is to-day. It costs a lot more to produce - current charges for 650 copies are \$622 for printing and \$293 for postage per issue.

The Association, over the years, has been greatly indebted to all those who have given of their time in the wrapping of the news. With so many of the earlier helpers no longer with us, it is hard (with failing memories) to record all those who have been a tower of strength in this task but we are reasonably sure that the following is a fairly accurate list. Prior to 1957 the paper was wrapped at the home of Fred Callaway and included Bert Holmes, Tom Crossman, Alf Carter and Max Herron. After that date and up to the present time, Max has been responsible for making sure the paper is printed and then wrapped for posting at his home in Beverly Hills.

Since 1957 the following members and their wives have given sterling service and are to be commended for their efforts: Max and Peg Herron, Bob Burnside, Don Lawson, Gavin Todd, "Sailor" Witham, Bob and Joyce McGregor, Jack and Laura Westwood, Harry Mostyn, Wal and Lal Page, Gordon and Olive Finlay, Jack Dodson, Alf Carter, Bob and Jean Dixon, Jim and Kathleen Field, Reg Armstrong, Jack Henderson, Doug and Roma Shearston, George and Joyce Walker, Nev. Woodham (on the occasion his taxi was in the Beverly Hills area) and Ruth Rhodes.

With age catching up and so many of the above who have passed on, or moved away from Sydney, the sole wrapping committee now consists of Gordon and Olive Finlay and Max and Peg Herron.

On reading back over the earlier news it is sad to read of so many old friends who have passed on, including Max Law (one of the original editors) and then late in 1996 our long-time Mail Bag editor Bob Lake. They are gone, but will never be forgotten.

Keep your letters coming and, hopefully, we may continue into the next century.

ANZAC ACTIVITIES 1998

WREATH LAYING - Friday 24th April

The Wreath Laying Service will be held at 4pm on Friday 24th April and all members are to assemble on the corner of Martin Place and Pitt Street, on the G.P.O side at 3.50pm and will place wreaths at the Cenotaph at 4pm.

ANZAC DAY MARCH - Saturday 25th April

Forming up will be the same as previous years for both units - 2/1st in Phillip Street, head on to King Street and rear of 6th Division - 2/2nd in Phillip Street near Martin Place and rear of 7th Division. Both banners will be displayed at respective assembly points. Check newspapers for any change in assembly point.

ANZAC REUNION - Saturday 25th April.

Occidental Hotel, 43 York Street Sydney is the venue for the Anzac Day Reunion Dinner. Board the train at Museum Station, after the march and travel around the loop to Wynyard Station. Proceed up escalator and turn right into York Street, walk along to first street which is Erskine Street and hotel is on South side corner. Enter from York Street into foyer.

Costing will be: - meal \$15. Refreshments Beer: \$1.70, Schooner \$2.20, Jug \$6.90 Service to tables.

ANNUAL MEETING - Friday 22nd May

The Annual General Meeting will be held on Friday 22nd May at 1pm at the Redfern R.S.L Club, corner of Redfern and Gibbon Streets Redfern and a cordial welcome is extended to all Pioneers to attend.

BILL ROBERTSON - OAM

With the announcement of the Australia Day honours it was pleasing to see the name of Bill Robertson 2/1 - 2/2 Pioneer as a recipient of the Order of Australia Medal.

In supporting Bill's nomination by the Clovelly RSL Sub-Branch our Association letter stated: -

"As a captain, Bill served with the 2/1st Pioneer Battalion in the siege of Tobruk. On return to Australia he was seconded to the newly formed 2/2 Pioneer Battalion, whose original members had been captured in the fall of Java. During the 1943 New Guinea campaign he was O.C of "D" Coy and took part in the Lae campaign including Nadzab, Tsili Tsili and Shaggy Ridge.

In 1945 he was appointed Major - Beach Commander, for the 2/2 Pioneer Battalion when they landed at Tarakan and Balikpapan.

Since the war, Bill has been Vice-President of this Association for thirty years as well as a staunch Committee man since 1948. He has not missed an Anzac Day March and Reunion Dinner and has attended all Country Reunions conducted by this Association, who fully support your nomination."

Bill has been a member of Clovelly RSL Sub-Branch since 1951 during which time he served as President for nine years as well as Welfare Officer. At the age of 94 years Bill is a Life Member of the Sub-Branch and in 1993 was awarded the Meritorious Medal by the RSL. Other positions Bill held with the Sub-Branch were pensions officer, delegate to the NSW State Congress and member of the Combined Anzac Memorial Committee.

On behalf of the Executive of our Association a letter of congratulations has been sent to Bill, as all Pioneers will agree he is a worthy recipient. Congratulations Bill, from all Pioneers.