



**THE BIRKENHEAD HISTORICAL SOCIETY**

(Incorporated 1979)

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# May/June 2013 NEWSLETTER



# Germany – Army of Occupation

Yes, at last, 1945 and we are at the end of the war. Germany had been beaten and the Army of Occupation was moving in. Then I found myself detailed for overseas service with the British Army and bound for Germany on a Channel Steamer. What a difference from a passenger ship to a war-time transport, with no luxuries or comforts (including deck chairs). When we arrived in France we boarded a plane and saw war-torn Germany. We were stationed outside a small town in the north, Grebbecke.

Attached to the Army, we interpreters were glad of our uniforms – a protection against Germans and Displaced persons who having nothing could, and did risk their lives, and those of their victims, for anything available. What desolation, town after town with skeleton factory and office buildings, heaps of rubble and bridges missing. We were stationed out of town itself which indeed no longer existed, encircled by high wire fences and surrounded by guards; we had to be in by 10pm. The German staff and cleaning personnel had to be home by curfew and, as they were on special passes, anyone out after 10pm lost their food tokens. The local civilians who had managed to return lived in holes under their one-time homes. Strangely like the French on the Somme I had seen as a child, living underground. This time the enemy.

There were no shops – coffee, tea and soap were artificially made. The coffee did not taste like coffee, the soap did not lather. Most of the German men wore their uniforms stripped of all insignia and buttons.

One day we were driven into Mindeu (?) for an Army concert – the last German stand in that part of the Germany – regained by the Australians. On the way home our Bavarian driver said “Wars are no good, no one wins”. My mind slipped back to those days on the Somme and the people in Albert Park standing outside shattered homes waiting for dark in order to claim for reparation from their Government. They had to sleep on the area of their pre-war home.

Another time a group of musicians released from concentration camps, were to entertain our troupes. Clothes had to be found for them and strange indeed they looked sitting on the platform in odd garments with paper shirt fronts – looking like scared scarecrows. When they played ‘God Save the King’ we wept. We did not know that before we saw them the N.A.A.F.I. had been feeding them with Army rations – that must have tasted like food from Heaven to them.

Another time, I almost got sent home to the U.K. My brother who was in charge of an Army Entertainment party from the U.K. had come out to Hamburg, a long way from where we were stationed. Some young officers drove me in, with strict instructions to be at a certain place after the concert in order to be back in camp by 10pm. Well, I saw the show and went back stage. As my brother was busy I had to wait and so missed my transport. It meant a long walk along a rough road to the one main road. Each side of the road shadowy figures stood before their broken homes ready to dive down below when the curfew sounded. But this city was full of hate; that hatred wrapped me round, cold and clammy – more frightening than any Air Raid I had experienced. I am certain only my uniform saved me and maybe Some One was watching over me as a large gun-carrier came along, hauled me aboard and somehow got me back to the camp in time. I shall always remember those men and their concern for me. I wonder where they are now – Yes no one wins.

Sylvia Cornish

# ANZAC DAY 2013



# COMING EVENTS

## **AGM Saturday 18 May**

Guest Speaker will be David Verran on the History of the East Coast Bays  
2pm St Andrews Church Hall  
Hinemoa Street

8 June 2013

## **Going For Gold**

Bus trip to Thames

We will be leaving at 9am from Verrans Corner and Museum 9.30am hope to be back before 5pm.

We intend to visit the Thames School of Mines the Stamper Battery and possibly the Thames museum. Please phone Mavis Throll 09-4837230 to book.

Price will be given on booking and please bring your lunch.

To Be Confirmed

20 July – Stories day

24 or 31 August – date to be confirmed – Regional Gathering Zion Hill

September – bus trip

October – Heritage Weeks – over 3 weeks

23 November – Christmas Party

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*Thank you to those who have supplied an email address for us to send the newsletters to. If anyone else would like to receive the newsletter electronically please don't hesitate to contact us with your email address.*

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