

#### **4/19 PWLHR Association**

This is the third and final year of our CO LTCOL John Pearse. The new CO is LTCOL Colin Thomas. The CO stated he was proud that the Regiment and her people had continued to surprise him with their efforts, dedication and understanding of what it is to serve.

2020 arrived in a ball of fire and Operation Bushfire Assist started for the Regiment on New Year's Eve. Within a day we were preparing the first PMV section of five vehicles to deploy to Gippsland (AO Coastal). Our first team was typical of those early days of the fires. They were a very obvious presence; they were a welcome boost to morale to regional communities and did all they could to help. They were a real credit to us all. An early task for that section was the transporting Metropolitan Fire staff through very difficult terrain to conduct damage assessments that would inform the majority of the planning for the state from that time on. That first section was soon relieved by a second section who continued to make sure that the entire capability offered by the PMV was understood by both civilian agencies and some of our military planners. The effectiveness of the PMV and the crews who manned them was a key capability in the burnt-out terrain. The first vehicles to reach Mallacoota were PMV's.

The Regiment also sent sections up North into AO Alpine, they got as far North as the Murray River and as far East as Omeo. The destruction in AO North was often overshadowed in the media by Gippsland, the devastation up North was also complete in its obliteration. Our people continued to provide protected lift right through to the end of February. They experienced destruction and grief in their own country but often reported that they felt proud to be of service in their own country. Those that did not serve in the fire zones contributed in the JTF HQ ensuring that vital operational and logistic planning was conducted. Others served in the State Control Centre working with the multiple agencies supporting the overall State effort. The CO stated it was impossible not to feel proud of their efforts, the entire Regiment turned out and those that did not serve in uniform were already busy serving in their civilian roles. One event worth mentioning is the support offered by some of our PMV crew during the search and rescue operation for a four-year-old child. The section provided vital mobility in rugged terrain, CPL Sharma reported that he was proud to be involved in such an important search effort at Waterholes, a locality 240km from Melbourne. After an extensive search operation consisting of more than 200 police and emergency service his team played a key role in finding and reuniting the toddler with his parents after spending a night lost and alone in the burnt-out terrain.

Late in February near the end of the fires we were able to cut away three of our LT's to attend their last module of the ROBC at the School of Armour. All did very well on the ROBC and have made excellent additions to A Sqn.

We returned to normal parading in March with the first weekend parade occurring on 14 March. It was an unusual feeling conducting Regimental mandatory training right off the back of two months of operations. However, unusual is one word that has followed us all year. We had only restabilised our unit and completed all of the backlog of administration when the first COVID-19 lockdown occurred. As a unit we were quite well prepared for remote parading. The 2018 reduction in Tuesday night parading, and the later use of remote on-line parading tools, had almost by chance prepared us for COVID-19. Our TP Leaders and Sqn Commanders have continued to develop online training mechanisms through the year. They have had guest speakers from the likes of the RSM Ceremonial and the Shrine speak to them via VTC. They have participated in Military Education presentations as well as using the new software developed by the Army to conduct tactical TEWT like activities. The Regiment's ability to adapt to this environment is testament to their training and conditioning.

June saw the Regiment deploy a TP of Cavalry Scouts to the School of Armour on Exercise Gauntlet Strike, the final assessment for the new full-time ROBC students. We provided PMV lift and Scouts to

the Cavalry TP Leaders so they could gain experience operating with the Scouts. At such a pivotal time in their career, the opportunity to have a positive experience with dedicated part-time Scouts can strengthen the bond between the full-time and part-time RAAC members. This effect will be enduring. It is another way the Regiment has asserted itself into the Total Workforce Structure.

While most of the Regiment has been involved with domestic operations and trg support, three of our people deployed overseas. CPL Kugler, LCPL Rouse and CPL Hale all deployed to Afghanistan as part of FPE-13, attached to Charlie Company, 5RAR high amongst the Afghan mountains. Their tasks revolved around Commanding PMV, Base Force Security and Guardian Angel tasks. They often travelled to training sites to protect the mentors and build relationships with the Afghan Army. At a time when our international operations are closing down it was great to see three dedicated members deploy. They were the first JNCO's to deploy wearing the Regiment's cap badge in Afghanistan. All three are now safely home.

The Regt deployed approximately 15 people as part of the border protection operation in the North of Australia. They were a fantastic team who did a really good job. They were the first Platoon not to experience any disciplinary issues for some time, which is an excellent reflection of their personal discipline and dedication. All have returned back to the Regiment.

Many of our people have been involved in OP COVID Assist. At one stage the Regt 2IC, OPSO, ADJT, RSM, Registry Clerk and 24 of our soldiers were all deployed to JTG 629.2. This meant that the OPSWO and the CO were left to develop the training program for the remainder of the year as well as prepare the yearly Regimental budget. Our people continue to serve in the JTG and will do so for some time. It has highlighted the nature of our part-time force, and the need for a situational reserve to be ready at a moment's notice to respond. Our success during the bushfires, COVID assist, supporting the School of Armour and providing a dedicated conventional force to respond to terrorism has only been possible because of the foundation warfighting skills developed in our people. Their ability to respond to high stress environments, coordinate, direct and act appropriately is all due to foundation training.

Since the second period of lockdown our Regiment has been parading via remote means on Tuesday evenings however, September sees the Regiment return to weekend parading. As part of the Division's move to a more domestic focus, there is a need for our people to become qualified in a number of skills as part of OP MAGPIE. We have come to a point in time that if we do not start getting our people qualified, we will not comply with the timeline directed by AHQ. We have taken the step to geographically divide our Regiment into three, with very tight force protection measures between the three regions as well as within each Region. As exemplars, we must ensure our people are ready to provide the directed capability, whilst ensuring that the greatest COVID safety measures are in place. This sees the month of September having four training weekends, one of each of the three regions and one for training instructors. As part of our MAGPIE contribution, our HQ will again lead the Brigade's force during the exercise planned in October/November.

The Regiment will continue to deliver essential qualification training throughout the remainder of 2020 as well as plan for the next high-risk weather season. Some will travel to HMAS Cerberus in November to conduct the necessary live fire qualifications. Our final parade weekend is scheduled for the 5-6 December. There will be the need to promote and reward our people for their efforts, but it may need to be separated into the three regions.

Lastly RHQ will undertake a hand over activity to the incoming CO in December. This day long activity will provide the much-needed detail of the Regiment in 2021. We have also been very fortunate with the posting plot. We have managed to secure people for all of our key roles which include both OC's, the Regimental 2IC and SNCO's.

### **The Regimental Association.**

The Association started 2019 in a strong position both financially and membership wise. There are currently 213 members.

The Association organised the Regiments Beersheba dinner had had several social outings including a BBQ at the Tank Museum Puckapunyal and trip to the Logistics Museum at Bandiana.

The Association held its AGM, and the following key appointments were elected:

President - MAJ Pat O'Hanlon Rtd, Vice President - Lindsay Burke, Secretary – Peter Sampson, Treasurer – Ian Dunlop.

Then came the Bushfire emergency which saw several of our serving members deployed closely followed by the Covid-19 Lockdown. The committee continued to meet via zoom and is planning for a time when relaxing of restrictions will enable our members to meet again.

### **The Regimental Museum**

The museum has a new curator, David Key BM and Bar.

The main effort for the museum is the refurbishment of an original "Pony Soldier" M113A1, ARN 134154 which landed in Vietnam on 08 Jun 1965 as part of the 1 Tp A Sqn 4/19 PWLH. The first Armoured unit to be deployed to Vietnam.

### **The Association Band**

Made up of mostly ex 4/19 PWLH band members, the band has performed at several commemoration events supporting mostly RSLs and has performed at the SoArmd Officers mess on several occasions as well. The Band supports the Regiment as well playing at the Regt Beersheba Dinner, the Christmas Function and at several Officers formal dinners. The band has about 20 members and is currently recruiting to round out several of the ensembles.

### **Ich Dien**