

# THE YORKER

JOURNAL OF THE MELBOURNE CRICKET CLUB LIBRARY  
ISSUE 41, AUTUMN 2010



IN THIS ISSUE : 1942 - THE SECRET MCG  
SPORT AND WAR · EVOLUTION OF FOOTBALL RULES 1872-1877

## THIS ISSUE

This edition of *The Yorker* contains the eagerly awaited second half of Trevor Ruddell's research on the evolution of the rules of Australian football up to 1877. The first installment, published in Yorker #39, received critical acclaim for Trevor's landmark research.

To coincide with ANZAC Day 2010 we publish two articles by Alf Batchelder. The first, *Sport and War*, looks at how the traditional sporting values of the time (such as honour, esprit de corps and self sacrifice) were exhibited by MCC members who served on the battlefields of the Great War.

The second piece sheds light upon an era of the MCG's history that until now has remained cloaked in secrecy: the occupation of the ground in 1942 by the United States Army's Fifth Air Force. For this we are most grateful to Mr Bob Shields, one of the US servicemen who called our stadium home, who donated more than 70 photographs taken at the time.

THE EDITORS

## A VISIT FROM RICHIE

Library staff members were thrilled to receive a special visit from Richie Benaud on the second day of the 2009 Test match. MCC vice-president Bob Lloyd and Peter French, assistant to the CEO, escorted Richie and his fellow Cricket Hall of Fame selector Mike Coward to inspect the Benaud tribute exhibition after the annual ACHOF meeting.

Richie expressed his delight at the exhibition, which contained items he had never seen, such as a selection of Benaud trade cards. He spent quite a deal of time taking in the range of material relating to his playing and media careers.

He was most appreciative of the work undertaken by the library staff and volunteers and especially thanked old friends including library research officer Peta Phillips.

The Benaud exhibition, in the showcase at the rear of the Grey Smith Bar and near the library entrance, will be on display until mid-May when our next major display – on the FIFA World Cup – will be installed.



# BOB SHIELDS AND CAMP MURPHY, 1942.

*Early in 2008, MCC guide Dudley Phillips phoned the library to ask if I could come down to the museum to talk to Bob and Wendy Shields from Colorado. When I met Mr Shields I could not believe my luck, for he had been a member of the United States Army's Fifth Air Force and a resident of the MCG in 1942, the most mysterious year in the ground's 156-year history.*

*Most of our knowledge of the history of the club and its ground comes from press reports, club records and eyewitness accounts but, in the serious wartime situation of 1942, these sources were almost non-existent.*

*After I explained that we knew extremely little about the Fifth Air Force at the MCG, Mr Shields promised to provide us with an account of his wartime experiences. In June 2009, we received much more than a memoir – Bob had demolished his photo album to send about 70 pictures that he had taken in Melbourne and in New Guinea.*

*Apart from providing our first detailed view of the ground's interior in 1942, the Shields donation contains pictures of some of the men who were quartered at Camp Murphy, as it was known, and of their subsequent service in New Guinea. It is an extremely important acquisition.*

ALF BATCHELDER

Bob Shields graduated from high school seven months before the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor. At 20, he was older than many of his classmates as family circumstances had forced him to abandon his studies for two years "to work and help put food on the table."

A month after Franklin Roosevelt had declared that December 7, 1941 was "a date which will live in infamy", Bob volunteered for America's armed services. Since "the closest place to enlist" was at an infantry camp in Des Moines, Iowa, he travelled 115 miles from his home in Unionville, Missouri, to join the US Army's Fifth Air Force. (A separate United States Air Force was not formed until 1947.)

A few weeks after enlisting, Bob Shields was part of a boatload of "green soldiers with no training ... headed for Australia." The raw recruits had been despatched with considerable haste. As Bob remarks, the United States "was completely unprepared for sending troops any place in early '42." Even by the time he boarded the liner *Mariposa* in San Francisco, he "had never seen an M1 rifle." The weapons were eventually issued at sea, packed "in individual cardboard boxes covered with Cosmoline", a gelatinous rust preventative. Bob recalls that "when we arrived in Melbourne in the first part of April there was no place to house us."

That situation was in the process of being rectified. Two months after the first American personnel had arrived in Melbourne, the Melbourne Cricket Ground was to be handed over to the Port Quartermaster, United States Armed Forces in Australia. Late on the afternoon of April 2, 1942 MCC secretary Vernon Ransford had learned that "the whole of the Ground was required for Commonwealth purposes as from the 7th day of April 1942."



Bob Shields - 1942 and 2009

On April 13, press reports announced that, as a "tribute to the men he led in the Philippines", General Douglas MacArthur had named his Australian headquarters "Bataan". On the same day, United States Army Headquarters in Australia announced that "American camps in Australia are to be named after officers and men killed in the Southwest Pacific area":

*The two first camps to be named are Camp Pell and Camp Murphy in memory of Maj. Floyd J. Pell, Utah-born Air Corps officer killed in action February 19 at*

*Darwin, Australia, and Col. William H. Murphy, German-born officer of the Signal Corps, whose bomber was shot down by a Japanese fighter, February 3, over Java.<sup>1</sup>*

In keeping with the secrecy of the time, the announcement made no mention of the fact that both camps were in Melbourne. Camp Pell was in Royal Park, while Camp Murphy, home of the USAAF's 11th Replacement Control Depot, was at the Melbourne Cricket Ground.

These developments came amid considerable uncertainty and even fear. The Japanese had seized the Allied bastions in Malaya, the Philippines and Netherlands Indies faster than anyone thought possible. Moreover, New Guinea was thinly defended. Australians feared that the Japanese might launch attacks on the industrialised south-east and might even occupy the continent's north-west.<sup>2</sup>

Few constants marked the American presence in Melbourne. The critical and changing war situation demanded a steady flow of men and materials into and around the country. Not only were new arrivals like Bob Shields young, untried and not fully trained, they experienced the old Army adage of "hurry up and wait".

One man said: "It just seemed that we were there, but no one knew what to do with us." <sup>3</sup> As Shields put it: "Our outfit had no nothing as a guideline to know how, when or where. Loose, loose. I was one of the motor pool personnel, which was a 'Mickey Mouse' operation."

In the flux that prevailed in Melbourne, it is hardly surprising that when the Fifth Air Force men moved in to Camp Murphy, they found that it "had not been used for troops prior to our arrival." While the meals prepared at the ground by Army cooks were adequate, the sleeping conditions were rather basic:

*We were to sleep on canvas army cots high in the bleachers, cold and windy. I carried in old newspapers 4" deep on my cot for insulation to keep from getting cold from the bottom. No mattress at that time.*

The austere facilities explain the reaction of Master Sergeant Kenneth Paul Meriam when told later in 1942 that he would have to return briefly to Camp Murphy. In his diary, Meriam wrote: "Phooey, hate to go back there ..."<sup>4</sup>

After languishing behind tarpaulins in the bleachers for two weeks, Bob Shields "then moved down to the athletic players dressing and shower room for the remainder of my stay." Others were apparently housed in tents erected on the northern side of the ground, between the stands and the arena fence.

Shields was a member of the motor pool, working behind the ground's outer wall that faced Brunton Avenue. The high brick fence enclosed an open space, with the western end of the New Outer Stand on one side and the green concrete stand that housed the scoreboard on the other. According to Bob,

*The motor pool office was at the back gate. As you stood in the opening you could look out a great distance to an open area where US soldiers from the Melbourne area played baseball and softball. I see it as being where the tennis courts are located at this date [2009] ...*

At times, Shields took men "for rifle instruction and practice shooting" to a place that was beside "the ocean". (This was probably the range near the Williamstown racecourse.) He recalls that "at least one softball game" was played on the arena and that on another occasion about "200 men in dress uniform with rifles" were inspected by "an Australian official minister of war".





**Bottom:** A softball game provides an unprecedented glimpse of the USAAF's 11th Replacement Control Depot, at Camp Murphy, 1942.  
**Opposite, bottom:** Outside, Captain Jones of the Motor Pool poses with his Jeep.



Not surprisingly, the young men quartered at Camp Murphy sought diversions outside. Though there were guards on duty, Bob Shields "went in and out of the back gate" that opened on to Brunton Avenue at "any time, day or night." He had been "most fortunate in meeting and getting acquainted with a young lady that worked at the mail order four-storey building", possibly Wake's, which was located opposite the City Baths.

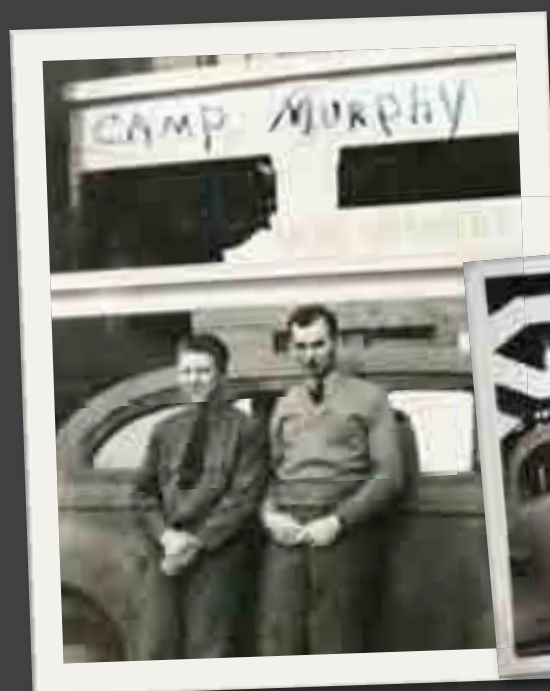
His friend was "one of six daughters named Smith" who lived in Hotham Street, East St Kilda, not far from the cemetery. Like so many Melbourne families who welcomed American servicemen during the war, the Smiths treated Shields as one of their own: "I was invited to Sunday dinners and other family gatherings. I was treated as a friend of the family for my entire stay. I ate my 21st birthday cake at the Smiths' ..."

Bob Shields believes that he was at Camp Murphy for 90 days. From there, he travelled in a convoy to Townsville. At some point, the group indulged in some kangaroo shooting but, in the process, Bob almost drowned in a nearby stream. When the convoy reached Townsville's Armstrong Field, there was "no nothing but us in army tents in a cow pasture half a mile from the boat, grass two feet high." Then, after a couple of weeks, "we were loaded ... at 2.00 a.m." aboard a Liberty ship bound for New Guinea:

*The reason for the delay was Japanese subs were sinking everything headed for New Guinea. When we did arrive, there were three ships lying in the harbour, having been sunk. On our way from Townsville, we rammed into an American boat at 2.00 a.m. on the second day out that was headed back and was being chased by submarines. The two Liberty ships hit within seven feet of dead centre.*

*The force was so great that it broke the chains that contained the trucks ... and all trucks, along with the men sleeping in and under them, went into the ocean ... We had two Australian corvettes as our escorts that managed to get us to New Guinea safely.*

*That first night we were bombed three times. I was with 32 other Melbourne soldiers, with no commissioned officers. No personnel in charge, no rank, no instructions, nothing. I ended up being the one in charge - that is a long story that no sane person would believe ...*





**Top:** Some lighter moments for armed guard Glen Kirkendall at the Brunton Avenue gate.  
**Centre:** Motorcyclist Bob Shields in Hotham Street, East St.Kilda; Captain Jones and Sergeant Doroshaw with a Jeep in Yarra Park.  
**Bottom:** Bob Shields and men of the Motor Pool.



Bob Shields is now in his 88th year. Since 1956 he has lived in Fort Collins, Colorado, where he has sold real estate and raised Angus cattle. Looking back on his wartime experiences, he says:

*"I saw a lifetime of misery and death that will always be there to remember and I give thanks for having been saved over seven or eight times."*

His words are a reminder that the men who lived at the MCG in 1942 were fighting a war that affected them in ways that later generations cannot truly appreciate. Bob is the sole survivor of the 33-man party that travelled from Camp Murphy to Townsville. In 2008, he made what he acknowledges will be his final visit to the Melbourne Cricket Ground.

Recently, he presented the club with a large collection of photographs taken between 1942 and 1944. Since we have had remarkably little information about the presence of the US Army's Fifth Air Force at the MCG, this is a most important donation – not only does it remove much of the mystery that has been associated with 1942, but it provides a glimpse of our former residents during their subsequent service in New Guinea.







**Opposite:** Scenes in the Motor Pool, which was located behind the Brunton Avenue fence.

**This page, top:** Cooks at a barbecue; the grave of Sarge, the Camp Murphy dog.

**Bottom:** Motor Pool personnel: John Maulson, Huntzler, "A Good Soldier", Alvin Dale.





**This page:** After about 90 days at Camp Murphy, Bob Shields and members of the Motor Pool travelled by road to Townsville, where they boarded a Liberty ship bound for New Guinea.

**Opposite:** Former Camp Murphy Motor Pool personnel in New Guinea, 1943-44.





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*We are grateful to Monica Walsh from the Library of the RAAF Museum, Point Cook, for her invaluable assistance and, of course, to Bob Shields for his recollections of Camp Murphy and New Guinea.*