

Report on Apprentices Together 2011

by Frank Maloney, AAAA Inc Event Manager

The Apprentice Together reunion was held in Canberra over the weekend of 27 to 30 Oct 2011. The organizing Committee comprised myself and Frank Poole. Several other Committee members in particular the Treasurer Owen Reynolds also played significant roles to ensure the success of the reunion. Added to that a lot of assistance was given by non Committee volunteer members who reside in Canberra, and through the local reunion co-ordinator Frank Poole, provided the individual supervision of each function. It is also appropriate to mention the sterling effort of Barry Teal to produce the reunion compendium, which all agree that it was a very professional document.

Whilst we were elated with the results and attendance of the 2008 reunion at Bandiana, we noted that it was the first AAS reunion in 10 years and that we had constructed a Memorial within the Gaza Ridge barracks adjacent to the Army Museum. We recognised that that our Canberra reunion would not have those strong drawcards so it was necessary to come up with a theme that would appeal to the members and the partners. For Canberra we arrived at an attendance figure of 450 to 550 which we considered was reasonably achievable given the success the Association was enjoying at the time in terms of membership and reputation. This proved a little optimistic, but manageable as we got closer to Oct.

Having access to an event software package that Frank P possessed made budgeting a fairly simple process and we established that it would be prudent to set the breakeven point at 350 attendees. This subsequently proved to be a most appropriate estimate. The budget contained fixed costs, and variables which were related to the number of attendees and in this way we were able observe the estimated financial position as the registration numbers flowed in. Credit must go to Frank Poole (10th) here as he was able to monitor our financial position on a daily basis with the number of attendees, and an estimate only of the financial position at any one time. We can and should do much better with our financial management with any future activities of this type. Those charged with the responsibility of conducting the event can rightly expect that when seeking financial information progress, that it will be available to them.

Thanks to the local Canberra team several accommodation locations were identified and published on the website. The response from a number of members proved the value of providing this sort of information. Several of our "grey nomads" expressed their thanks for the effort in relation to camping and caravan parks.

We are fortunate that the nature of the reunion is that the cash flow is generally positive and this event proved no different. Reunions really up the workload of the Treasurer Owen Reynolds (13th) with the processing of hundreds of attendee payments in a short period of time. One of the difficulties he faces is in the source of revenue via the direct deposit

process where the individuals have not identified themselves. Hours are spent resolving this so that we are correct in our accounting but also ensuring we have the attendance register accurate. Unfortunately we always have cancellations at the last minute where people are not able to attend. We have been able to offer refunds in these circumstances. If anyone has been overlooked please contact me without delay.

Another area that is interwoven with the Reunion and the financials is membership. I seek to remind all that the principal driver of the 2008 Bandiana reunion was to increase Membership, and to that end it was very successful. A recruiting drive formed only a part of Apprentices Together however I am informed by Craig Malcolm (31st) Membership Manager, that again we achieved a good result with new members and renewals, so that our financial membership is now in excess of 600 which is the highest achieved by the Association since it's inception.

Credit must go to Frank Poole for his efforts for Apprentice Together 2011. In the last few weeks leading up to the reunion Frank also picked up a lot of the Association workload following the resignation of Barry Teal (10th) as President, and Lucas McGann (35th) assuming the duties of acting President. As the Secretary Neil Bennett (13th) was enjoying a well earned overseas holiday with his wife at this time, Frank stepped up to the mark and dealt with matters secretarial prior to the AGM. This was done in a most professional manner, and in addition to his responsibilities as Reunion Co-ordinator. Take a bow Frank!

The Meet and Greet

The Meet and Greet at EPIC on 27 Oct 2011 was the first of the functions and was lively and most enjoyable. The venue was bigger than we eventually needed and a little out of the way, but it was close to the Australian War Memorial Annex. A mini bus was hired, and operated by Laurie Wiseman with his unidentified loadmaster, and they conveyed most of the attendees to visit this very interesting complex.

The registration desk was manned by Jeff Heron (21st) with wife Jan and were the friendly face of the AAAA to administer all the arrivals, and even though the line was at times quite long, they remained unflappable, and all were processed most efficiently. Special thanks to a good team there.

The Brian & Barb Daley Raffle Inc. in the company of their assistants Trisha Richardson and Lorraine Grant to name but two, once again took total control of the raffle and raised over \$ 1200 for the kitty.

The Australian War Memorial

The Australian War Memorial was the place for our Reunion Wreath Laying on Friday 28 Oct 2011 at 2 pm. This was indeed a highlight of the Reunion. The AWM organisation was excellent in the planning and conduct of the service, including our Association participants. The weather was good and the setting perfect, so together with the Wallabies choir, the Royal Military College band, and the well researched and powerful Eulogy delivered by Norman Wells (14th). With the assembly of some 200 of us we created a highly emotionally charged gathering.

Our Trustee Fred Millar was foremost with the AAAA wreath followed by four donated wreaths of the sponsor Corps, i.e. RAEME, RA Sigs, AABC and RAE. All the wreaths were created in the Association and Corps colours as appropriate, and were spectacular in their arrangement. A good number of private wreaths completed the impressive display.

This was followed by afternoon tea and free guided tours by AWM staff of this truly National treasure. Credit must go to Michael Kusternig (17th) for his good work with AWM on behalf of the Association to ensure that the wreath laying proceedings went without a hitch. During the ceremony Mike also recited *The Ode* in a most dignified and respectful manner.

The Annual General Meeting

The Annual General Meeting was held at 10 am on 29 Oct 2011 at the Southern Cross Club. This was a well attended meeting with over 100 participants. It dealt with the things that are the province of an AGM and the minutes are available on the website. Life Memberships for Frank Poole and Jack Westernhagen were announced and accepted by the meeting.

The Partners Gathering

The Partners Gathering was held in conjunction with the AGM. It was most encouraging to see the number attending. This activity was included to provide a relaxed format whilst being informed of the way in which Defence Community Organization care for dependents and families of our troops on active service overseas. Many had lived through the tough times, particularly during the Vietnam conflict, and were eager for knowledge of how it is done these days. The hostess for the event was Mrs Jodie Luhrs, wife of our new Patron Brig David Luhrs (35th). Mrs Luhrs created a most enjoyable session with the many willing participants in the room, and endeared herself to all.

The Reunion Dinner

The Reunion Dinner had us back to the Southern Cross Club at 6.30 pm on the same day. Over 300 were seated to enjoy the evening at tables of 10. Every attempt was made to keep the microphone silent, but on occasions such as this that is not so easy to do. Patrons, past and present were in attendance and wise words delivered by both. The new patron, Brigadier David Luhrs, briefly addressed the gathering and made it very clear that he felt honoured to be the Patron of the Association and would take a very keen interest in its affairs. He then presented Frank Poole with his Life Membership badge, and unfortunately Jack Westernhagen was unable to attend the reunion. Frank delivered words of thanks on behalf of he and Jack. As always the raffle draw of some 15 prizes was a lot of fun, particularly with Jodie Luhrs in her new role as 'AAAA barrel girl', drawing the winners from Brian Daley's (14th) barrel, for the announcing of winners.

Our retiring Patron Ken Gillespie (23rd) briefly addressed the gathering in his usual and forthright manner which was very well received by the *mob* particularly when he referred to his time as an army apprentice, and that he would gladly do it all again for another 43 years. President Lucas McGann presented Ken with a mounted photograph of the gathering at the 2008 reunion at Bandiana.

Peter Thornton (35th) is to be thanked for his audio visual display which ran all evening and created an enormous interest, with many requests for purchase of a copy of the DVD

coming forth. This is to receive priority attention by Merchandising in the new year. Bill Mertin (22nd) was the team member who managed all aspects of the Southern Cross Club functions.

A last minute inclusion in the evening agenda was a recital by Robert Ludlow (13th) of a poem he created for the jubilee reunion of the 13th in 2010 at Tweed Heads. The title of the poem is "Say goodbye to Mum" and at the conclusion of his reading there was much reaching for the tissues.

The Memorial Church Service

The Memorial Church Service held at St Pauls Church at the Royal Military College, Duntroon on a beautiful Sunday 31 Oct 2011 was a fitting location for our last reunion activity. The attendance was such that we almost filled the church. We were treated to a couple of expert dissertations on the construction of the impressive complex in the early sixties, by two of our own who were involved at the time, namely Herb Taylor (2nd) and David Wilson (12th). The service was conducted by our Chaplains, Craig Potter (38th), Bryan Nicholls (11th) and Keith Noldt (14th). How fortunate we are to have three of our own pedigree as Chaplains of our Association and that they were able to leave their parishes over the weekend to attend our event. The Canberra Vietnam Veterans are to be thanked for the morning tea and bikkies which rounded off a most pleasant morning, and concluded the Apprentices Together 2011.

The 14th Intake at the Canberra Yacht Club.

As advertised a number of the 14th assembled at the Canberra Yacht Club for a wind down session on Sunday afternoon. Quite a number from other intakes supported this group, which then headed off to Tuggeranong for an Asian meal that evening.

Special mentions must go to my associate Frank Poole and his Canberra team, for their excellent planning and hard work to make it all happen and especially to those Apprentices and partners, who travelled from all parts of Australia, at considerable time and cost, to support their Association.

Finally, special thanks must go to those Apprentices and Partners who travelled from far and wide to support the Reunion by their attendance. We understand that many simply were unable to come for various reasons, but their expressions of goodwill were pleasing to receive.

Thank you all and best wishes for this festive seasons,

Frank Maloney

AAAA Events Manager