

2 NZ Regiment – 50th Anniversary Celebrations

Former members of 2 NZ Regiment accompanied by spouses, widows, family members and friends gathered for two commemorative events during November 2009.

The first event was a Reunion in Palmerston North over the period 5- 8 November attended by 155 folk. During the Reunion visits were made to both Waiouru and Linton Camps.

The second event was a Tour of Malaysia and Singapore 23 November – 3 December by 44 folk with the main aim to revisit Taiping on Wednesday 25th November 2009 -exactly 50years from the day that we arrived there in 1959. We achieved that aim, however, more about the Tour later.

The Reunion got underway with a visit to Waiouru Camp on Friday 6th November, 50 years and one day from the day of departure for Wellington by train - Thursday 5th November 1959. The rail tracks from the Camp siding to the main line have long gone but a portion of the platform remains. A lasting reminder of the commencement of our journey to Taiping!

Our day in Waiouru got underway with a visit to the National Army Marae followed by lunch in the Waiouru Camp soldiers' mess. We lined up for self-service and for many it was some 48 years since last dining in a soldiers' mess. Lieutenant Bob Tanner during his appointment as Catering Officer in our Battalion had introduced "self-service" into the soldiers' mess in Taiping. Our cooks told him that his initiative was not practicable and would result in wastage of food. Bob persevered and self-service became the accepted serving option! A "first" for 2 NZ Regt!

After lunch we had a drive around Waiouru Camp and found that many of the buildings that were familiar to us in 1959 are still in use. The main parade ground that the RSM "Snow" Allen had control over remains a drill square. Our drive took us to the outdoor ranges in the Home Valley - an area that was very familiar to us. The next stop was at the new indoor ranges where very modern technology is used to teach weapon handling and fire control. All of us were most impressed with the sophisticated electronic equipment being used. And, some of us had the opportunity to step up to the mound and get a few shots away!

On the way out of the Camp we had a short visit to the National Army Museum and were able to confirm for ourselves that the "medals are back"

On Saturday morning we took the opportunity to have a discussion about welfare matters followed by a chat about the future of 2 NZ Regt Reunions. The general consensus was that we should gather again in about two years time and once again in the Palmerston North/Linton Camp area. In the afternoon we made a visit to Linton Camp and were hosted by 1 RNZIR who welcomed us back into the infantry brotherhood and gave us the opportunity to view the History Room and look over some of their modern equipment. The afternoon concluded with a short service of commemoration at the Linton Camp Memorial Wall. The Reunion was brought to a close at an evening gathering at the Palmerston North RSA that was enjoyed by all.

As mentioned above a Tour party of 44 travelled to Malaysia and Singapore commencing 23 November. After two days in Penang during which time most of us took the opportunity to revisit sites familiar to us during 1959-1961, we boarded two buses on Wednesday 25th November for our journey to Taiping. Penang Island is now connected to the mainland by a 13-kilometre bridge so it is very easy to get to and from the island. Our first stop was the Kamunting Christian Cemetery where three of our 2NZ Regt folk are buried. We found the cemetery well maintained and we were able to conduct a simple ceremony of remembrance at Toma Solia's gravesite with his cousin John Solia, a member of our party, recounting his memories of Toma. From the cemetery we were taken to the location of our former Sobroan Camp. We had succeeded in re-entering the camp exactly 50 years to the day of our arrival - Wednesday 25th November 1959! There the Malaysian Army unit occupying the camp welcomed us and a lunch was served under a shelter on the site of the former 2 NZ Regt Transport Park. From our lunch site we could look across the sports fields to the rifle range and in the background loomed Maxwells Hill. After lunch we walked around the camp and could identify a number of familiar buildings including the guardhouse and the company offices. The entrance to the camp has been changed and is now off the road that in 1959 led to the school, church, cinema and officers' mess. The new entrance gate opens directly between what was our Battalion HQ and the Sergeants Mess. All in all a great trip down memory lane and we were most appreciative of the kind hospitality given to us by the Commanding Officer and soldiers of the Malaysian Army. After leaving the Camp we drove around Lake Gardens and then made a short stopover in the town centre. There were a few

familiar spots like the padang, the prison, the market and the site of the Paris Bar. Outwardly from our brief look not a great deal appears to have changed but as we know only too well, appearances can be deceiving.

Then onto Ipoh for an overnight stay before heading to Kuala Lumpur. In Kuala Lumpur on the evening of Thursday 26th November we attended a dinner party at the home of our High Commissioner Mr David Kersey. On 27th May 1961 we had paraded on the Padang in Taiping to forge an alliance with the 7th Royal Malay Regiment Regiment (7RMR). A number of former members of 7 RMR were living in Kuala Lumpur and they accepted the High Commissioners' invitation to be present at the gathering. The evening was most enjoyable and to mark the special occasion an exchange of gifts was made. We were presented with a Malay kris (dagger) in a very handsome presentation case and in return we presented 7RMR with a patu. We were very honoured to have the Malaysian Army Deputy Chief of the General Staff attend the function and during his speech he mentioned the strong and lasting ties between the Malaysian and New Zealand Army that had been sealed with the alliance between 7RMR and 2 NZ Regt. All in all a memorable evening and we were most appreciative that our High Commissioner had hosted the gathering at his attractive and spacious home.

On Saturday 29th November we travelled to Terendak Camp near Melaka (Malacca) to visit the cemetery located within the Terendak Camp complex. At rest in the cemetery are two former members of 2 NZ Regt – Jim Gatenby and Ike King. The bus trip to Terendak took us via Port Dickson and off the high-speed modern motorways that link the major cities of Malaysia. The road and the countryside from Port Dickson reminded us of Malaya as we knew it during 1959-1961. After our ceremony of remembrance at the Terendak Camp cemetery we were taken to the area that was occupied by the New Zealand battalion from 1961 to 1969 known to us as Wellington Lines. A Malaysian Army unit now occupies the area and they, along with the Commander of the Malaysian Army 3rd Division hosted us for afternoon tea in their officers' mess. We were surprised to be greeted by the Commander with a cherry "Kia ora Kiwis" and an account of his time spent in Waiouru on exchange in the late 1980's. Once again none of us left the gathering empty handed and we left Terendak Camp overwhelmed by the generosity and kindness extended to us by the Malaysian Army.

After an overnight stay in Melaka we motored to Singapore travelling via the Second Link on the border between Malaysia and Singapore. During our stay in Singapore we made a visit to the Kranji Cemetery and all were impressed with the beauty and serenity of the resting place of the many thousands of service personnel buried there. There is only one word to describe the surrounds – they are "immaculate" and a great credit to the Singapore authorities and the Commonwealth War Graves Commission.

After a couple of days in Singapore we boarded our return flight to New Zealand and reflected on a memorable 11-day tour that lived up to our expectations. Steve Parsons, our tour leader did a great job in coordinating our accommodation and transport both of which were first class. Apart from two members losing their wallets on the monorail in Kuala Lumpur we returned home unscathed with everyone accounted for and no health problems. In the words of a fellow traveller – it was "awesome"!